148 PAGES OF THE BEST COMICS FEATURES, INTERVIEWS & REVIEWS

COMIC HEROES

COMICS FOR EVERYONE

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AUTOBOTS, SPACE OUT!
HOW MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE REINVENTED TRANSFORMERS COMICS

+

THE HERNANDEZ BROS RELAUNCH LOVE & ROCKETS

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COMICS FOR EVERYONE

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WELCOME!

EDITOR'S PHOTO © 2015 KEVIN LOWE

Hello you, and welcome back. (Or, if you're reading us for the first time thanks to our "Total Film Presents" promotion, it's great to have you with us.

Like many of you, I'm sure, I was shocked and saddened to hear of the passing of the artist and writer Darwyn Cooke back in May. I first read Darwyn's work in DC's *The New Frontier* and was blown away by its elegance and beauty, but also the warmth and love for the material that it conveyed. It's so easy to be cynical in this world (especially in a year that seems determined to rob us of our heroes), but Cooke's art had a magical way of smashing down the walls of adulthood and making you feel like a kid again. I'm proud that we're able to pay tribute to him in this issue, starting on page 14.

Elsewhere, we have an in-depth interview with the mighty Hernandez brothers on the enduring legacy of *Love And Rockets*, a feature on *More Than Meets The Eye* – the Transformers comic you don't need to be a Transformers fan to fall in love with and, of course, our cover star, Ms Harleen Quinzel, not to mention all the usual gubbins. See you again on Oct 4th.

Will

Will Salmon, Editor

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HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST N COMICS WORLD

SITH HAPPENS

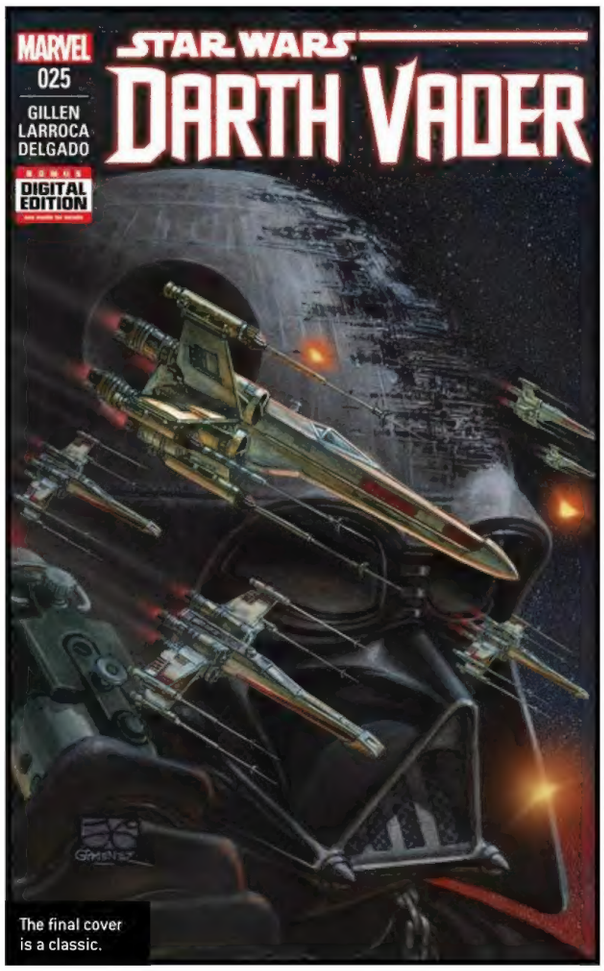
Marvel's excellent Darth Vader comic is a consistent bestseller. So why is it wrapping up with issue 25? We spoke to writer Kieron Gillen to find out more...

***Darth Vader*, penned by Kieron Gillen and drawn by Salvador Larroca, is by far the best book currently being published under the *Star Wars* banner. A complex tale full of rich characters and moral ambiguity, it's a fan favourite and regular bestseller. So why end it?**

"We always said it was a story with a middle, a beginning and an end," said Gillen when we caught up with him to find out more. "We realised during [*Star Wars* crossover arc] *Vader Down* that it was actually heading towards the end sooner than we'd expected. Clearly we could have spun it out, but when that would only have weakened the material, it would be a foolish idea. So we decided to end it as we wanted it. Get off the stage."

Comic Heroes: Has your conception of Vader changed at all over the course of the series?
Kieron Gillen: I think it has deepened but not exactly changed. You see the reflections in the obsidian black finish better. Issue 24 – which is basically us doing the equivalent of Vader's trip into the cave on Dagobah – I couldn't have attempted, let alone pulled off, back then. He has always been a surprise, though. You put Vader in a room, and all that's predictable is how incredibly direct he is. Everything else is up for grabs. There's always a shiver when you get a line you know is right too.

Some stunning action from # 21.



The final cover is a classic.

IMAGES COURTESY OF MARVEL. TM & © LUCASFILM LTD.

This is the Vader we all know... and fear.

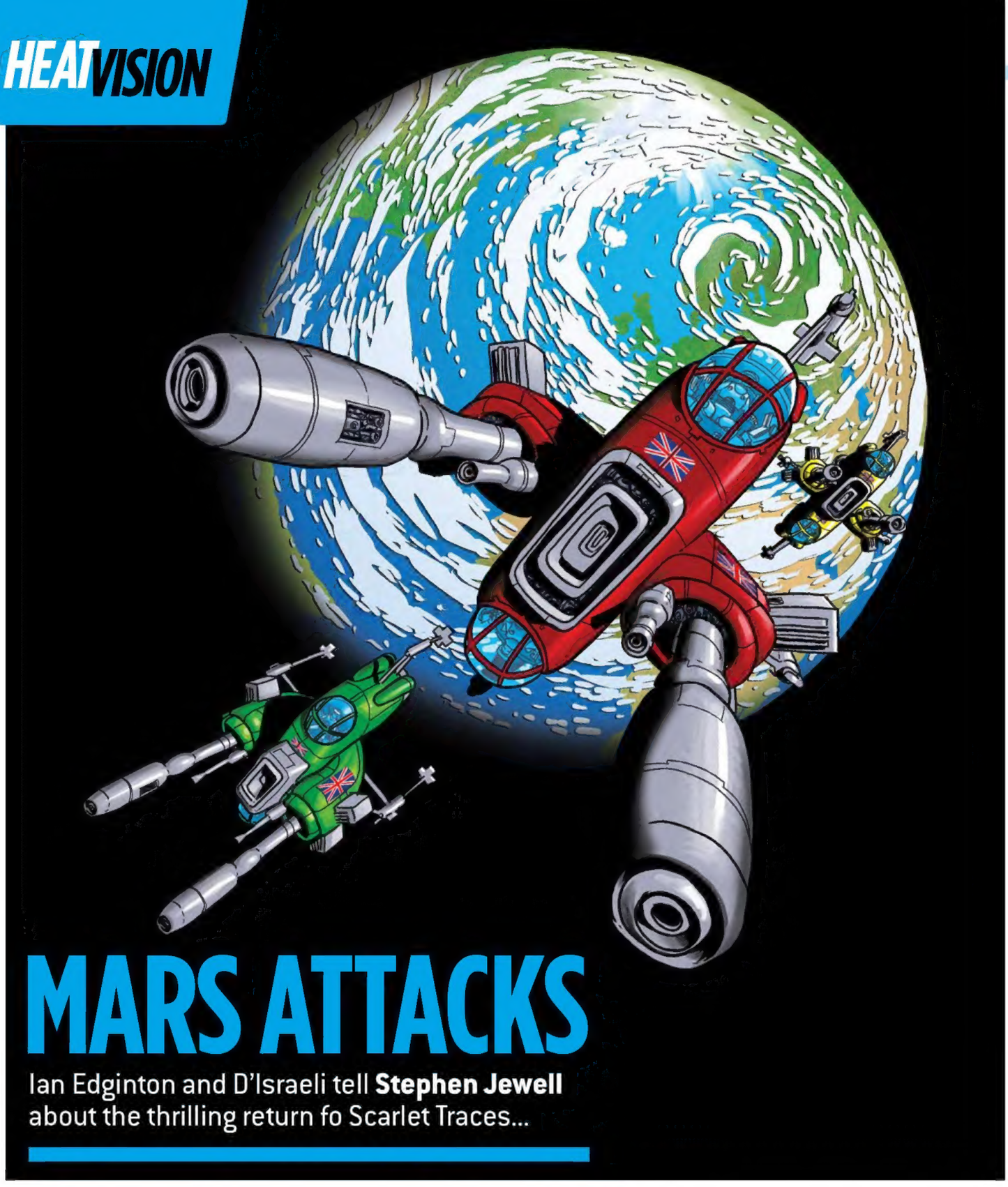
CH: You worked with Salvador on the entire series – that's fairly unusual in a long-running title...
KG: Yes, it is unusual, which has made it a joy. Of all my Marvel work, it's the only time it's happened. Salva's a beast – his speed, his technicality and the scale of his imagination are difficult to comprehend. We talk occasionally, but it's primarily all via the scripts. That said, when we've done 18 issues in a year or something like that, the scripts are close to actually being a regular correspondence in letters.

CH: What has been the most enjoyable aspect of working on the book?
KG: I almost feel guilty about saying it, but it's how fun it's been. I'm very work-ethic about what I do, so [the fact] that I'm laughing so much when writing it seems almost like cheating. Obviously, there's areas which have been really hard work, but the vast majority has been a sherbet-rush.

CH: The series has introduced some really memorable new characters. Assuming any are left standing at the end, are you looking forward to seeing what other creators do with them?
KG: It's already been fun – passing Aphra, the droids and Black Krrsantan over to Jason Aaron for a little while [in *Vader Down*] was a lot of fun. In a perverse way, when writing in a shared universe, characters actually seem more real when you see someone else writing them. They have an existence outside your own head. But future books and other writers? I note you say "assuming." That's a big assuming.

CH: Can you say what projects you have coming up next?
KG: I'm working on something else for Marvel that I can't talk about yet. *Über* is returning in October, and *The Wicked + The Divine* is continuing. We're doing our first special in September, which goes back to the 1830s pantheon and I get to do my takes on the romantic poets as gods. Byron as Lucifer, Mary Shelly as Woden, etc. It's a fun time.

CH: Finally, just how much are you looking forward to seeing *Rogue One*?
KG: I am basically an enormous grin with legs.



MARS ATTACKS

Ian Edginton and D'Israeli tell **Stephen Jewell** about the thrilling return fo Scarlet Traces...

Handily coinciding with the 150th Anniversary of HG Wells's birth, Ian Edginton and Matt 'D'Israeli' Brooker's *The War of the Worlds*-inspired *Scarlet Traces* is coming to the pages of *2000 AD*.

"Matt and I had been discussing doing more *Scarlet Traces* for a few years now," says Edginton, of the series which was originally published by Dark Horse in 2002, and followed by a sequel and an adaptation of Wells's original novel. "Because we'd done so much work for *2000 AD*, it seemed like the perfect fit."

With Edginton describing *War of the Worlds* as "a thrilling alien invasion story that's also a meditation on the arrogance of empire," its themes appear more relevant than ever. "At the time, the British Empire seemed unassailable but Wells purposefully had the arrival of the Martians prove that there's always someone bigger and stronger than you," says Edginton, noting that the events of *Scarlet Traces* has caused history to deviate radically.

"The further out we go time-wise from the initial invasion, the more we see the repercussions of those changes," he continues. "From small things such as household stoves using tech derived from the deadly Martian heat ray, to Princess Margaret

Above: Human technology has been greatly enhanced by Martian technology in the new series.

becoming Queen instead of her sister. As the series progresses, we see the ripples of that alternate world grow wider and wider. Alternatives are stacked on alternatives, so we have a world and an England that is both recognisable and alien at the same time."

Twenty-four episodes in length, divided into two twelve-part segments, "The Cold War" takes place in the 1960s, allowing Brooker to pay tribute to some of his childhood favourites. "Since each *Scarlet Traces* story is set in a different ear, there's been a natural evolution of the visual references as we move through time," he explains. "So the original *Scarlet Traces* was clearly referencing steampunk, but "Cold War" is more obviously referencing stuff like Dan Dare and various Gerry Anderson TV series."

With two decades having passed since the conclusion of "The Great Game", which saw the Martians lay waste to London and most of Southern England, Britain is just starting to recover, although the rest of the world is rapidly catching up. "Other nations, especially America, have got hold of the Martian tech that gave the British Empire such an unfair advantage for so long," says Edginton. "They've begun mass producing Martian derived devices for themselves, significantly undermining British industry."

Reflecting the ongoing situation in Europe and the Middle East, Britain faces a refugee crisis as thousands arrive seeking sanctuary, and not just from other parts of the Empire but also Venus, which the Martians invaded in the wake of *The War of the Worlds*. "News arrives from Venus that the Martians are up to something," teases Edginton. "They're dying out and have been for centuries, but now desperation has pushed them to take dramatic action. There are no more invasions, nothing quite so mundane as that. They're looking to reshape the solar system, which will wipe out all life within it in the process." CH

Scarlet Traces begins in 2000 AD's Prog 1988.

Above: Some of D'Israeli's fabulous, retro-influenced art on the new series.

IN THE FRAME

ANNOUNCEMENTS, INFO AND OTHER INTERESTING STUFF...

HELL PIG

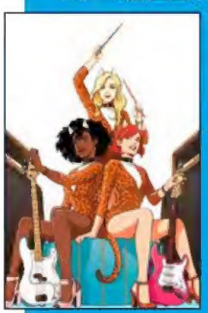
We didn't see this one coming. *Cerebus*, Dave Sim's long-running aardvark adventure series is due to return in a September one-shot. *Cerebus In Hell* picks up after the titular character's death. Sim is no longer able to draw, so the art will be a collage made with the assistance of Sandeep Atwal.

NEW FABLES SPINOFF

Vertigo's *Fables* ended last year, but a new monthly spy thriller spinoff is on its way. *Everafter: From The Pages Of Fables* is written by Matthew Sturges and Dave Justus, with art by Travis Moore and Tula Lotay on covers.

RIVERDALE EXPANDS

Archie are further populating their New Riverdale universe with two new books. *Betty & Veronica* is written and drawn by Adam Hughes and *Josie & The Pussycats* by Marguerite Bennett and Cameron DeOrdio, art by Audrey Mok.



COCK-UP CORNER

Last issue we published a piece on Mark Millar's *The Saviour* that we were very excited about. Alas, we missed off the author's name. It was Graham Kibble-White, who penned our Transformers piece this issue, and who kindly didn't sue.

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UNCHARTED TERRITORIES

Peter Milligan's Britannia explores a Roman mission to these shores...

Britannia is set at a time when this country was on the very edge of the so-called civilised world. Written by Peter Milligan, with art by Juan Jose Ryp, it centres around Antonius Axia, the world's first "detectioner," who is sent by the Emperor Nero on a perilous mission to British shores.

"I had this idea, and I thought it would be a good fit for Valiant," says Milligan, who believes that the four-issue mini-series is closer in tone to the *Eternal Warrior* series he penned for Valiant than his stint on *Shadowman*. "*Britannia* is a bit darker. As we're rooting so much of it in history – although we do stray into pure fiction – it also feels quite different to the other stuff I've done for Valiant."

Stating that, "it made a big impact on me when I was young," Milligan drew on his formative love of Robert Graves's *I, Claudius* and the subsequent Derek Jacobi-starring television show. "Something like that never leaves you, and it can surface in changed form in stories like *Britannia*," he reasons, insisting that his main motivation for embarking upon *Britannia* was not to explore the well-worn genre of historical fiction.

"I was more intrigued by this man, this ex-Roman soldier, who for reasons that we discover in the story thinks differently from a lot of his contemporaries," he continues. "He considers himself rational, so he looks for clues, signs, cause and effect, while most of the people around him make sacrifices to a plethora of gods to get answers." Describing him as "a modern man whose fate is largely controlled by Nero," Antonio also pits his wits against Rubia, the chief Vestal of the Vestal Virgins.

"She is almost as powerful and certainly as cunning as Nero, and one of the things I've enjoyed about writing this story is finding out more about the Vestal Virgins, who held a remarkable place in Roman society," says Milligan, revealing that Britannia itself is a strikingly different place to Rome. "When we get to Britannia, this mysterious land of druidism and wyrd women, things start to spin off in such a way that Antonius's rational mind is put to the test."

Milligan is also full of praise for Juan Jose Ryp. "The thing about writing a book like this is making the past, or your idea of the past, as real as possible," he says. "Juan's rendering of places and most importantly characters really brings it to life. It's amazing stuff!"

***Britannia* is published by Valiant in September**

Right and above: Some superb examples of Juan Jose Ryp's intricately detailed work on *Britannia*.

> **"I WAS INTRIGUED BY THIS EX-ROMAN SOLDIER, WHO THINKS DIFFERENTLY FROM HIS CONTEMPORARIES"**

TOY STORY

Hasbro's worlds are colliding in IDW's new Revolution...

In the words of Cullen Bunn, what's really cool about Revolution is that "it's not a superhero crossover, although there's still something pretty 'super' about these characters."

Co-written by Bunn and John Barber, with art by Fico Ossio, the five-issue event brings together not only Transformers and G.I. Joe but also Rom, Micronauts, M.A.S.K. and Action Man for an event which encompasses all of IDW's various Hasbro properties.

"I've always maintained that it's great if the Transformers and G.I. Joe comics take place in the same world, as I love shared universes," says Barber. "There's a lot of exciting stuff that can grow out of the opportunities that are created when characters bump into each other."

Intriguingly, the series springs out of a plot detail from the Simon Furman-scripted *Transformers* #0, IDW's first comic featuring the robots in disguise, originally published in 2005.

"I really like taking pieces of existing stories and building on them, which makes it feel like one continuing, big tapestry," says Barber. "There was a material called Ore-13 that the Decepticons were searching for which sort of overpowers the Transformers. Over the years, we've learned more about it, and now it can be processed into Energon, which is the Transformers' food, basically. It's one of the big reasons why Earth is attractive to Cybertronians, as there are useful resources there. A few issues ago in *Transformers*, Optimus Prime declared Earth to be under his protection, whether it wants to be or not. So as *Revolution* begins, something goes wrong with Ore-13 all over the world."

While Barber and Paolo Villanelli's *Action Man* monthly launched last month, a new *M.A.S.K.* series by Brandon Easton and Tony Vargas will spin out of *Revolution* in November. "Action Man plays a big role in *Revolution*," says Barber. "He's part of a long-running lineage of UK government agents, and is like a one-man equivalent of the G.I. Joe team. We'll also see the M.A.S.K. team coming together in *Revolution*, as we'll find out that at least one member of M.A.S.K. has a direct tie to some of the existing human elements on Earth."

Alongside the core series, IDW will release a series of one-shots featuring the likes of Rom and the Micronauts. "We've been working very closely with the other creative teams to make sure that it all works well together," says Bunn. "We know where they're all headed and how their books weave in and out of the main story. With the Micronauts' *Revolution* book, we'll see them at the moment right before they enter the crossover, and then we'll see them adventuring on Earth in the issues following that." CH

Revolution is published in September.

Above and below: Like your toybox coming to life and starting a big old scrap.

IN THE FRAME

ANNOUNCEMENTS, INFO AND OTHER INTERESTING STUFF...

DOG GETS COMIC

Boo, the so-called world's cutest dog, is set to star in his own comic. The beetle-eyed menace will be making his four colour debut in September from Dynamite. No word on the creative team yet.

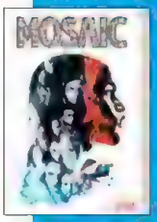
MORE TANK GIRL

Alan Martin and Brett Parson's revived Tank Girl will be returning for the second instalment in a "trilogy" of mini-series. *Tank Girl: Gold* debuts in September from Titan.

FINE YOUNG ANIMAL

Doom Patrol, *Mother Panic*, *Shade The Changing Girl* and *Cave Carson Has A Cybernetic Eye* are the four initial titles to be released from DC's "hang on, doesn't this sound a bit like Vertigo?" imprint Young Animal later this year.

QUANTUM LEAPER



Meet Morris Sackett, a new Inhuman set to debut in a Marvel ongoing series from the duo of screenwriter Geoffrey Thorne and artist Khary Randolph. Basketball player Morris has the power to jump into other people, controlling the bodies and memories of those he inhabits. *Mosaic* debuts in October.

IMAGES © THE RESPECTIVE PROPRIETORS

THE STORY OF BRITISH COMICS SO FAR...

The Lightbox gallery in Woking is mounting Cor! By Gum! Zarjaz! – a five-month exhibition about British comics...

The history of British comics is a rich and storied one – and one that *Cor! By Gum! Zarjaz!*, a new event at the Lightbox Gallery aims to explore over the next five months. Paul Gravett spoke to co-curator Hamish McGillivray to find out more.

CH: What are the main goals of the exhibition?

HG: It's all about storytelling. I'm keen to show that this type of graphic narrative is not a 20th century European/American phenomenon. We will show how the use of sequential art has been going on for thousands of years around the world and how in the UK it is still evolving using hi-tech digital methods and low-tech craft. Oh and throw in a bit of nostalgia from 1930s to 1970s including *The Beano*, *Bunty*, *Eagle* and *2000 AD*. We have devised some fun ways to explore the highlights of the medium's history, so expect some hidden doors, jigsaw puzzles, a fairground tent and a mini chill-out zone to read graphic novels. It's designed for a family audience but there will also be exhibits to tickle the comics specialists.

Above: Alan and Zara - the two characters guiding visitors through the exhibition

Opposite page: Some of the many rare and unique items on display

CH: Can you introduce us to the two exhibition guides?

HG: Many surveys report that only 30% of visitors read exhibition captions. So I have been thinking for ages, why not get some comic characters as almost life-size cutouts to introduce visitors to the highlights and guide them round the exhibition? The two characters are granddad Alan and granddaughter Zara, both based on family members. Alan is

Main image © The Artist and The Lightbox; Reading Whoopee! 1977 © Acme Museum Services; Samurai helmet, c.1800, courtesy of Horsham Museum; 2000AD, Judge Dredd with helmet cover 1979 from MacBros collection; Reverse of Ally Sloper Tramps Abroad puzzle box, 1899 © Worthing Museum and Art Gallery

a cheerful comics collector. Zara is, at first, a bored 9 year-old, a bit attached to her tablet. She encourages Alan to take her on a journey about the history of comics. From my concept sketches the amazing Asia Alfasi has brought them to life as manga-style characters.

CH: What are some of the surprise display items in store for visitors?

HG: Our opening section, "Cor! Is That A Comic?" features by far the most ancient piece in display: a 3,000-year-old stone stela of an Egyptian family tree in hieroglyphics from the fab Petrie Museum, London. We're also showing an amazing three metre-long series of Japanese samurai prints by master 19th century printmaker Utagawa Kuniyoshi, and plenty of rare original comics artwork and memorabilia, from a bust of *Eagle*'s Pilot of the Future, Dan Dare to the shocking debut artworks of the horror that was the shark, Hookjaw!

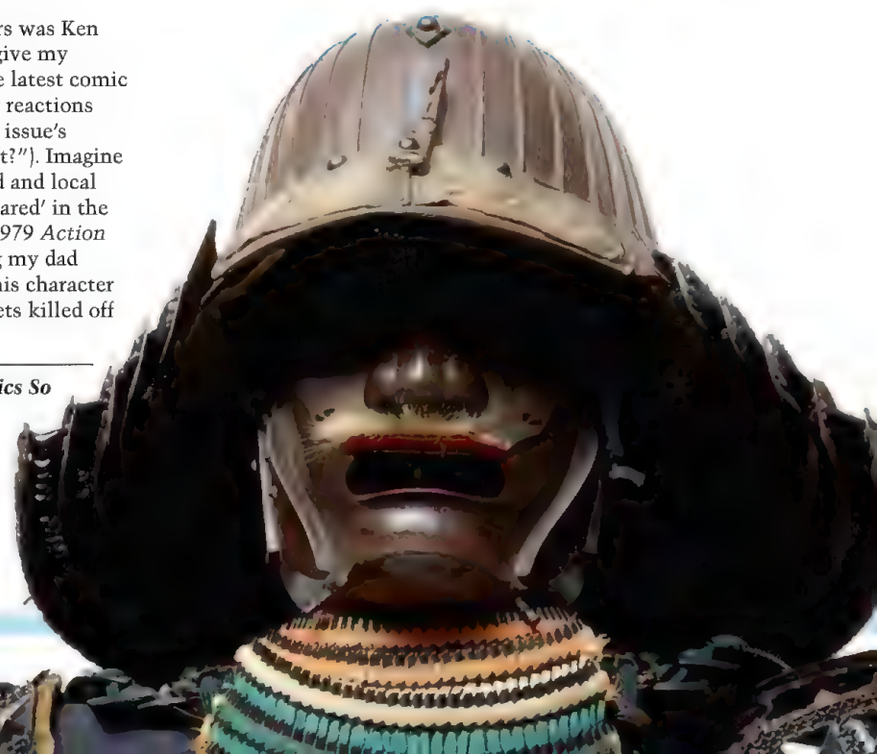
Also unique are the installations by theatre set-builders Bower Wood to house some of the displays, including a recreation of a typical 1950s newsagents in "By Gum! Do you remember?" We'll be refreshing the comics in it throughout the exhibition's run, starting with summer specials, changing to Fireworks Night and spooky comics for Halloween and finishing with Christmas-themed issues and, of course, annuals. Another pair of sets will contrast the 1940s/1950s studio of local "Nipper" strip cartoonist Brian White with the latest 21st century studio. And the final "Zarjaz! Whatever Next?" section will demonstrate innovations in internet and interactive comics.

CH: What is your own family's connection to Action's ravenous shark, Hookjaw?

HG: One of our neighbours was Ken Armstrong, who used to give my brother and I copies of the latest comic he had written to test our reactions ("There's no blood in this issue's *Hookjaw*, has he gone soft?"). Imagine our surprise when our dad and local neighbour Roy both 'appeared' in the *Hookjaw* episode in the 1979 *Action* summer special. Roy rang my dad laughing his head off, as his character is the hero, and my dad gets killed off by page 2 EN

The Story of British Comics So Far…: Cor! By Gum! Zarjaz! is at The Lightbox, Woking from August 6 to December 31 2016, admission £5 for an annual pass, under 18s go free.

"IT'S DESIGNED FOR A FAMILY AUDIENCE BUT THERE ARE EXHIBITS TO TICKLE THE SPECIALISTS"



DARWYN COOKE

1962–2016

Stephen Kelly pays tribute to a one-of-a-kind stylist whose distinctive vision showed us all a new way of looking at superheroes – and life itself >

Cooke excelled at period characters such as the Spirit and the Rocketeer.

His stylish future Batman is cartoony but moody.

The beauty of Darwyn Cooke's art was that it never lost its sense of optimism. Just look at his DC covers from 2014: Catwoman grinning as she whizzes down a highway; Superman saving a speechless child from a train; Alfred covering an exhausted Bruce Wayne in a blanket. Within his playful pages Cooke immortalised hope and wonder, joy and romance, in a style informed by the past but never enslaved by it. It stood strong and distinct, serving as a reminder of what superheroes can and should be.

The artist brought a fresh take even to DC's darker characters like Jonah Hex.

On 14 May 2016, at the age of 53, he died of cancer – leaving behind a world that's now just that little less bright.

Cooke began his comic book career in 2000, with the sharp, perceptive character study *Batman: Ego*. Yet this came after 15 years of pitches, persistence and jobs in advertising, art direction and animation. He had been drawing since he was five, his earliest work being a picture of Adam West's Batman (his favourite childhood TV show) drawn in crayon. But it was at 13 that he would discover his calling, when a reprint of *Spectacular Spider-Man* #2, drawn by John Romita, "blew my mind." It was this comic that focused his talent and led to him leaving Toronto at age 20 in order to make it as an artist in New York. He had initial luck – he sold his first story to DC Comics in 1985, which appeared in *New Talent Showcase* #19 – but struggled to make ends meet. He moved back to Canada, and – after various jobs – was hired by Bruce Timm to work on animations such as *Batman: The Animated* Series, *Superman: The Animated Series* and *Batman Beyond*.

Batman: Ego was an idea he'd had since the mid-'90s, but it was rejected – along with many other ideas – time and time again. (This was the age of Image Comics, after all, and Cooke drew more like Alex Toth than Rob Liefeld.) In a stroke of luck, however, DC Comics' new art director Mark Chiarello stumbled upon the pitch while clearing out his predecessor's office. Written and drawn by Cooke, it was a bold and surreal story, in which Batman and Bruce Wayne come face-to-face to discuss why they do what they do. It was Cooke's big break, and from there he went on to work on several projects at Marvel, including *X-Force* and *Spider-Man's Tangled Web*. Yet it was DC Comics that would define his career.

In 2001 writer Ed Brubaker asked him to reboot Catwoman, a project he was initially reluctant to take on because of the character's history of being sexualised and degraded. "I don't care where people get their jollies," he once said, "but I feel my work reflects a definite point of view regarding women, and their strength and their sexuality, and what Catwoman was at that time as a character... I knew I couldn't be associated with it if that's what it was." Following a series of backup stories for *Detective Comics* and the >

IMAGE S © DC COMICS

A uniquely personal vision of DC's iconic characters and their world.
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Jimmy's
TWENTY·FOUR·SEVEN

New Frontier is a landmark in DC history as much as in the artist's career.

"THE REAL WORLD IS A HEARTBREAKING BITCH, BUT MY ROMANTIC HEART STILL TRIES TO PUT IT OUT THERE IN MY WORK"

Cooke's JLA embody a classic kind of heroism.

original *Catwoman: Selina's Big Score*, his sleek and functional redesign of her costume would prove iconic, becoming the go-to look for Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises*.

But *DC: The New Frontier* was his breakout work – both in writing and art. Released in 2004, over six chapters, it reimagined the DC universe in a time of '50s nationalism and Cold War paranoia. Naturally the retro setting complemented Cooke's style, but it was about more than nostalgia. With striking elegance and deft, thoughtful storytelling, he captured what it meant to be a DC icon – what it meant to be brave, hopeful and happy. You have not seen a superhero smile until you've seen a Darwyn Cooke superhero smile.

His gift for sequential art would only grow. In 2005 he helmed DC's revival of '40s pulp classic *The Spirit*, capturing not only Will Eisner's charm and sense of humour but updating the franchise in a way that made it hip and exciting all over again. Then, in 2009, at the peak of his powers, he produced his take on the *Parker* crime novels by Donald Westlake (AKA Richard Stark). Published by IDW, Cooke's four *Parker* adaptations were visual storytelling perfected. Whether it was an action-packed fight or panel after panel of complete silence, his command of camera was exhilaratingly inventive and dynamic. Combining this with his incredible use of light, shadow and monochromatic colour, *Parker* remains one of his most impressive projects.

INTO THE STORM

Cooke's rockiest point was probably the *Watchmen* prequel series in 2012, when he illustrated *Before Watchmen: The Minutemen* and wrote *Before Watchmen: The Silk Spectre*. Not creatively rocky – his two contributions were easily the strongest of that slate of titles – but *Before Watchmen* provoked an angry reaction from some corners of fandom, who saw it as a cynical cash in on Alan Moore's classic. As Cooke said at 2015's Wondercon: "It's the first time I'd ever been on the ass end of the internet deciding you're evil... It's really easy to think that 40 people on the internet are the whole planet. There were guys that just beat on that night and day... It's amazing the degree to which a certain vocal minority are able to colour your opinion of yourself or affect your approach to the work you do."

Cooke's mastery of light and shadow made his art incredibly versatile.

Not that Cooke couldn't take it. Over time, however, he did grow disillusioned with the adult direction of many comics. "I can't really read superhero comics anymore because they're not about superheroes," he said last year. "They've become so dark and violent and sexualised." He occasionally clashed with others in the industry, though he insisted that it never hindered his work. He told the *Comics Journal*, "I'm a typical romantic who has been beaten down to a hard, flat and cynical composite. The real world is a heartbreaking bitch, but my romantic heart still tries to put it out there in my work."

Cooke's last published project was as artist for Vertigo miniseries *The Twilight Children*, a romantic science-fiction story written by Gilbert Hernandez filled with beauty and wonder. But he was also planning to adapt more *Parker*, and was working on a creator-owned crime comic at Image titled *Revengeance*. Death is a cruel thief, but it's often cruellest for creatives. What art have we been robbed of? What incredible feats could Cooke have achieved next? In only 16 years of working in comics, Darwyn Cooke already gave us far more than we deserved. CH

A master storyteller and stylist, Cooke could make any characters fresh again.

Canon, Heresies and Apocrypha. Good Books and Cardinal Sins.

ABOUT LEAH
Leah Moore is a writer of comics, prose and journalism, as well as the co-founder of the revolutionary *Electricomics*. She nas written for *Albion*, *Wild Girls*, *Tom Strong* and more. Follow her on Twitter at **@leahmoore**.

When a book is created, it escapes the minds of its creators and is set free into the world, to touch its readers and affect them, shape them, and find its place in the vast meta-library that is our collective consciousness.

At the Fall of Nineveh, in seventh century BC Assyria, the Library of Ashurbanipal was razed to the ground with a fire "so intense that clay tablets bubbled and melted like hot glass". Thousands of stories. Billions of tiny marks in neat rows pressed into clay by scribes. Thousands of narratives and characters, and pieces of information vital to the 210,000 citizens of that vast sophisticated city-state, reduced to black crystalline lumps by the fires of war.

The Library of Alexandria, where Cleopatra put 200,000 scrolls gifted to her by Mark Antony, burned several times, including at the hands of Julius Caesar's army in 48BC. The collected work of who knows how many Egyptian scholars, Roman philosophers, Greek astronomers and mathematicians, lit and lifted on the wind, to rain as ashes on a battlefield.

All those stories gone and yet we know their essence – we can read Gilgamesh, or the Upanishads, or Beowulf, or the Iliad, and we can see the characters drawn on a million potsherds, a hundred temple walls. Those stories are alive. They prevail. They survived the white hot death of Nineveh intact.

"For stories to live on, they must fracture, multiply, change and grow, become archetypes"

For stories to live on in this way, they must fracture, and multiply and change and grow. Sometimes they live on in splintered forms in cultures thousands of miles distant from one another. They become archetypes, symbols that need no explanation, they become deities, found religions and wage wars of their own.

Some stories are revered as scripture, as canon, and any that pervert their truth must be heresies! Apocrypha at best, these unwanted diversions are kept at arm's length, dismissed by scholars and clerics, reviled by the devout.

Aha! My loyal reader thinks. This is all an unwieldy metaphor for comics! She is saying that plunging the cast of one beloved story into a completely separate beloved universe is actually fine, because that is just the natural splintering of a great epic story, and those characters will prevail and live on! Taking a hero and hitting "flip horizontal" on his character traits, well, it's okay because they are just apocrypha! Just pound-land versions based on Saturday cartoons of our heroes. They aren't hurting them at all!

Nope.

The limits of our world have grown a bit since we were pressing reeds into clay tablets. We have a million different ways to create, to bring something into the world that is truly ours. We can write and draw and 3D-print and laser-cut a whole new world for ourselves, in the blink of an eye. We all have in our pocket a device more complex than the one that took us to the moon.

What do you do then, with this great power? What do you do to delight and uplift the people of this brave new world, when you can do absolutely anything? What do you put on the vastness of that white page? You make something true and real that is yours to give, you make stories that people will love and remember. Stories that will shape people and help them grow. You build Nineveh.

PHOTOGRAPH © 2016 BEN COLLIER

“To date, the Star Wars saga has only picked up one Oscar nod for acting. Name the nominated thesp!”

#SMARTERMOVIEMAG

KA-PUNCH! A COMIC BY MARC JACKSON

OK GRANDMA...
NOW YOU KNOW I'M A SUPER-HERO AND THAT BIG CITY IS FULL OF SUPER-VILLAINS AND TOTAL WEIRDOS...
I NEED A SIDE-KICK!
YAWN...
Z
GRANDMA! ARE YOU LISTENING? I NEED YOU TO CONCENTRATE IF I'M GOING TO TRAIN YOU AS A SUPER-HERO!
WHU?! WASSAT?
GRANDMA! JEEZ!!!
NOW REMEMBER, I HAVE COSMIC-PUNCH POWERS, SO I NEED TO BE CAREFUL!
I'M GOING TO 'PRETEND' TO PUNCH YOU AND I NEED YOU TO REACT AS FAST AS YOU CAN!!
KA-PUNCH!
OOOOFF!!
GRANDMA!! I'M SO SORRY! I THOUGHT YOU'D ACTUALLY MOVE JUST A LITTLE BIT, ARE YOU OK?
WILF?
WILF, IS THAT YOU?
GO TO THE LIGHT WILF, LEAVE THE MOTHER-SHIP...
GRANDMA, YOU REALLY NEED A FORCE-FIELD OR SOMETHING. I WISH THAT GENE THE SPACE-GENIE COULD COME BACK AGAIN!
uURRRRGHHHHH...
KA-ZOOF!
HEY LITTLE SUPER-DUDE! I'M BACK!
GENE!
I THOUGHT I ONLY GOT THREE WISHES! WHAT GIVES?
?
WELL, FOR THE SAKE OF THE COMIC, THIS MADE SENSE!
WHADDAYA NEED?
I WANT TO SAY SUPER-POWERS FOR GRANDMA, BUT NOW YOU'RE HERE, I'M ALSO FEELING HUNGRY FOR FISH...
DON'T SAY TACOS, DON'T DO IT MAN!
GURP!
DID SOMEBODY SAY FISH TACOS?
WILF, YOU OLD SMOOTHY! TAKE ME, I'M YOURS!
YURK!
?
SPROING!!

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MORE NEXT TIME!

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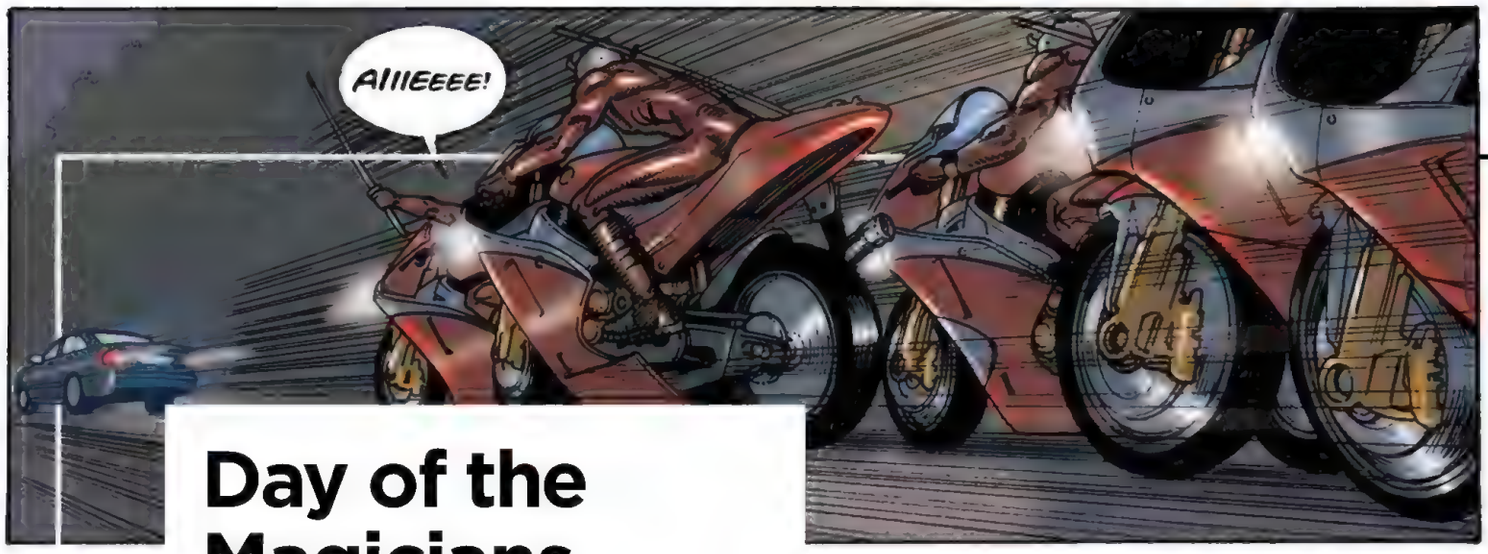
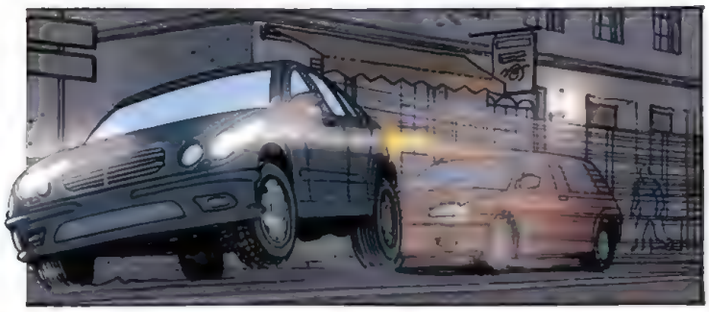
TOTAL FILM

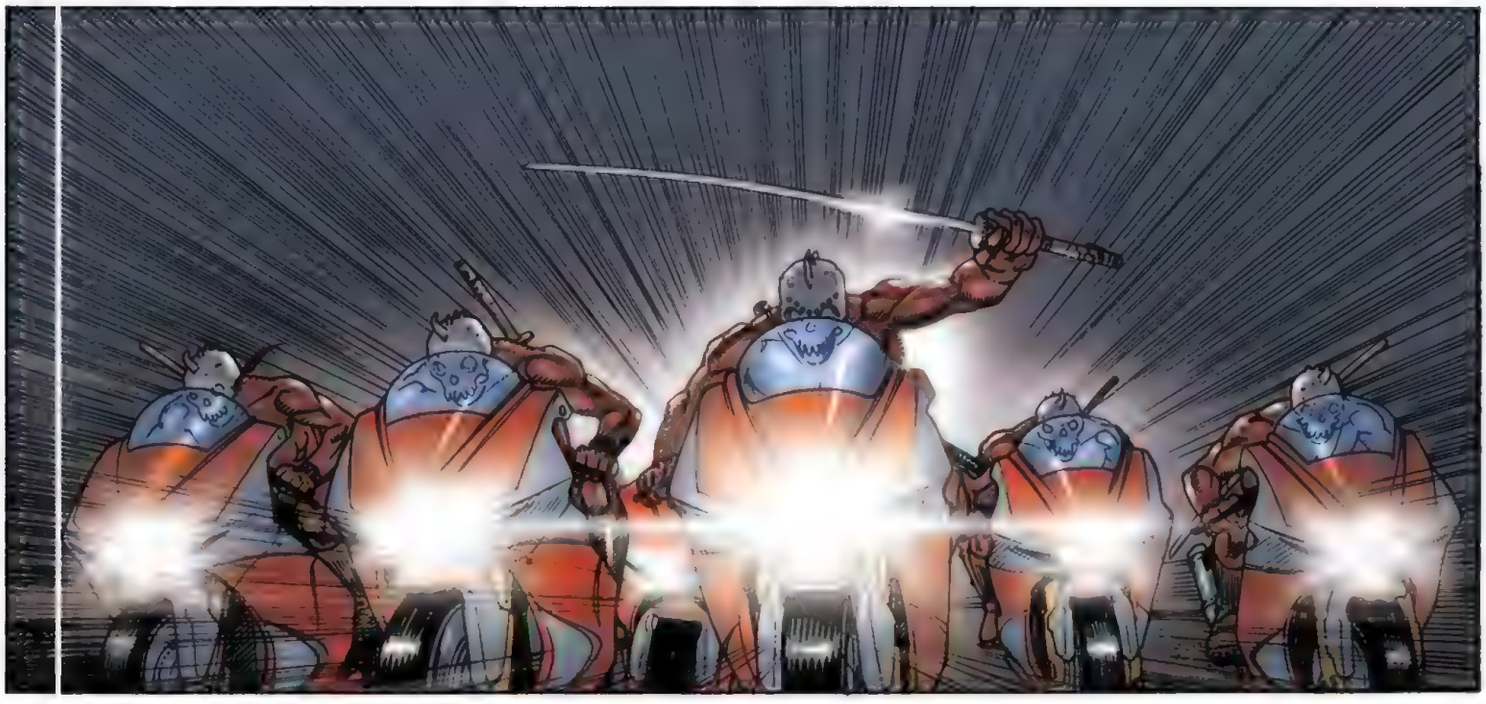
#SMARTERMOVIEMAG



Day of the Magicians

Drazen is a magician tasked with finding and killing a renegade sorcerer. There's only one problem here: his target is his own father. Michelangelo La Neve pens this fantasy saga, with superb art by Marco Nizzoli. The whole story, out of print for several years, has just been re-issued in two volumes from Humanoids.





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Doctor Who: Supremacy Of The Cybermen

After the success of its *Four Doctors* crossover, Titan is giving us another multi-Doctor tale. "Supremacy Of The Cybermen", a five-issue story marking 50 years of the silver giants, features Doctors 9, 10, 11 and 12, plus a bundle of companions from the comic range and TV. Cavan Scott and George Mann write, Alessandro Vitti draws, and the series kicks off in July.

COURTESY OF TITAN COMICS

DARK SOULS: A PICTURE PREVIEW

The creative team behind Titan's *Dark Souls* comic share work-in-progress art from the smash hit comic's first issue...

Creating the Crystal Labyrinth

Alan Quah (artist): When George suggested the Crystal Labyrinth environment, my initial research was leaning towards *Dark Souls*' crystal cave but at the same time I wanted to make it a little different with the colour scheme. This being a vast landscape, my reference came after how crystal reacts to light and how it creates multiple colours. The rest is pretty much designing structures to make them look like they were chiselled but at the same time look raw.

George Mann (writer): With the Crystal Labyrinth I was trying to do two things, really – to give Alan a strange, twisted, angular environment to draw (and something that felt deeply fantastical, but in a *Dark Souls* sort of way, and not a typical "high fantasy" landscape), and to play with the idea of mirrors and reflections. With Fira slowly losing her memories to the undead curse, this seemed like the perfect way of reflecting things back at her, and allowing us to reveal some of the backstory to the reader (and to Fira!) without having a huge info dump or being forced to start earlier in the story and follow things through in a linear progression. I've been keen all along with this series to slowly eke out the backstory, to reveal clues to the readers as we go, true to the spirit of the games, rather than setting it all out upfront. So having a landscape that reflects things back at Fira – things she might not even remember herself – was a great way of revealing a few hints of what's to come. CH

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SHAPERS OF WORLDS

RAPID-FIRE Q&As WITH COMIC CREATORS

KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR

The all-time NBA superstar, actor and author tells **Stephen Jewell** about taking Sherlock's older brother from prose fiction to comic books in *Mycroft Holmes And The Apocalypse Handbook*

CH: Are you a long-time comics fan?
KAJ: I started where most kids start with Batman, Superman and Flash. But in the early '60s with the explosion of Marvel heroes like Spider-Man, The Fantastic Four and the X-Men, a whole new universe of possibilities opened up. It was easy to relate to a teenager like Spider-Man with all the same problems I faced at school.

CH: Are you still a Marvel fan? What are your favourite comic books at the present time?
KAJ: My favourites now are *Y: The Last Man* and *Saga* by Brian K. Vaughn and Pia Guerra; *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons; *Kingdom Come* by Mark Waid and Alex Ross; Garth Ennis's *The Punisher, Preacher* and *Hitman*; and anything by Matt Fraction and Frank Miller. What I enjoy about these is an elevated level of wit, action and gravitas. They all have an edgy realism that is exciting to experience.

CH: Was it a natural progression for you to do a Mycroft mini-series for Titan Comics after publishing the novel last year?
KAJ: I'm a fan of alternate reality stories like DC's Elseworlds, *Flashpoint* and *Earth 2*. I like the way those stories play with our expectations, constantly surprising us with clever takes on stories and characters that we think we know. After finishing the Mycroft novel, which sticks very closely to the tone and style of the Sherlock Holmes stories, I wanted to turn my own creation upside-down and do a completely different take.

CH: What makes *The Apocalypse Handbook* more suitable for a comic series? Is it more fantastical in nature?
KAJ: It's a grand adventure in the tradition of *Indiana Jones* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. The villains are bigger than life, and the steampunk futuristic weapons are much more

Below: The Victorian steampunk world of Mycroft and Sherlock Holmes, as drawn by Joshua Cassara with colours by Luis Guerrero for Titan Comics' new series.

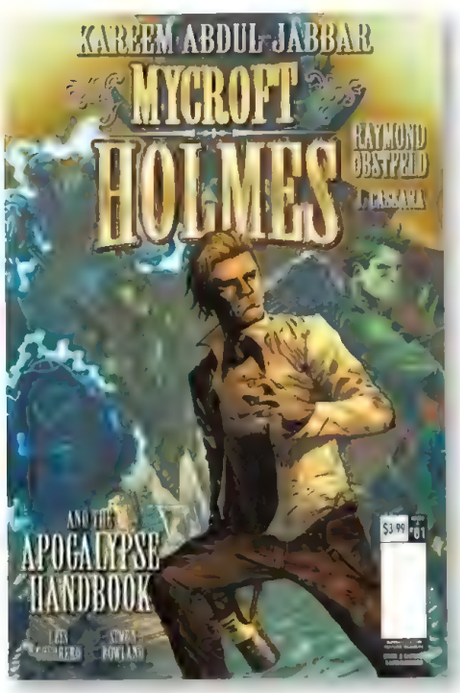
effective when seen in colour rather than described.

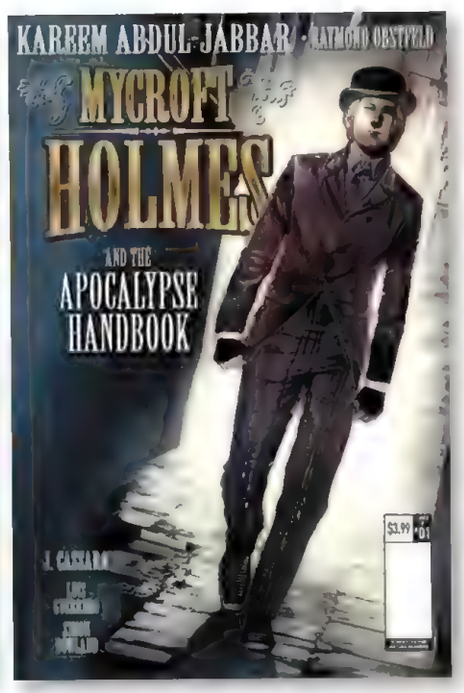
CH: Will we see a different side to Mycroft and, in particular, his relationship with Sherlock?
KAJ: The Mycroft in this comic is a gambling, womanising rogue, but still the smartest person in any room. We do explore the relationship between the brothers, which at first is pretty funny as they relentlessly compete with each other. But as the series progresses, we discover more about their relationship as children and we understand them both better.

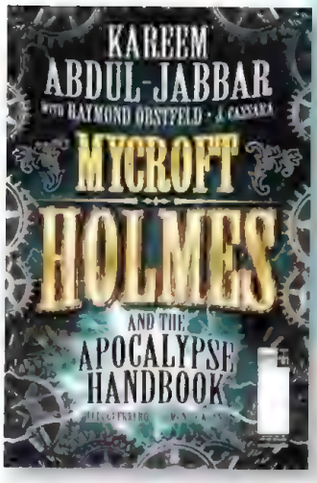
CH: Do any other well-known supporting characters from the Sherlock Holmes canon make an appearance in the comic?
KAJ: There are no other regulars from the Sherlock stories, but we do establish some regulars of our own, including Queen Victoria, the outlaw Jesse James and Mycroft's beautiful and deadly half-Native-American, half-African-American bodyguard.

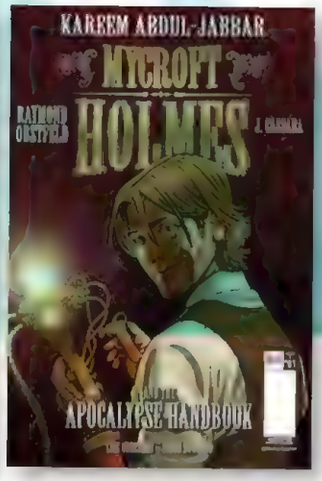
CH: What do you find most fascinating about the Victorian London milieu?
KAJ: Victorian London represents the world on the cusp of radical changes in social mores, scientific discoveries, class upheavals, and much more. The proper world was struggling against all hope to maintain the old order. Sherlock and Mycroft symbolise this kind of "new person," who is oblivious to the formalities and dedicated to their own intelligence and logic rather than tradition.

CH: Can you tell us more about the threat that Mycroft faces in *The Apocalypse Handbook*?
KAJ: Without spoiling anything, Mycroft gets recruited from his slacker lifestyle by Queen Victoria to act of behalf of Great Britain at an auction of the most devastating, futuristic weapons ever created. Attacked by assassins, outlaws and even a Frankenstein monster, he must find a way to stop the ruthless villain behind it all. Only it's not who he thinks it is.









Above: typographic cover for issue 1 by Rob Farmer and variant covers by (above) Paul McCaffrey, (below left) Joshua Cassara and Luis Guerrero, and (below right) Rod Reis.

CH: You're co-writing *The Apocalypse Handbook* with Raymond Obstfeld. How does your partnership work?
KAJ: Raymond and I sketched out the entire five-issue arc together. We kept throwing out more and more preposterous ideas that we'd like to see in a comic. Then we got down to figuring out what we could keep and what we had to cut. We had enough material for two more series. We then wrote all five issues, each of us adding scenes and the other offering suggestions. We've been writing together for a few years now and pretty much know what the other is thinking.

CH: *The Apocalypse Handbook* is drawn by Joshua Cassara, who worked with Noel Clarke on *The Troop*. How do his likenesses of the main characters compare to what you had in your mind after writing the novel?
KAJ: His likenesses are nothing like what I envisioned – they're better! When I first saw the rough sketches, I was delighted. When I saw the final product, I couldn't stop smiling. He's such a creative and dynamic artist.

CH: What are your future plans for Mycroft? Are you hoping to do more comic books and novels?
KAJ: The wonderful people at Titan and I are discussing that right now. We seem to be in agreement that readers want more. CH

JODY HOUSER

The *Orphan Black* and *Womanthology* author tells **Stephen Jewell** about taking Faith from the ranks of *Harbinger* to becoming Valiant's new breakout star

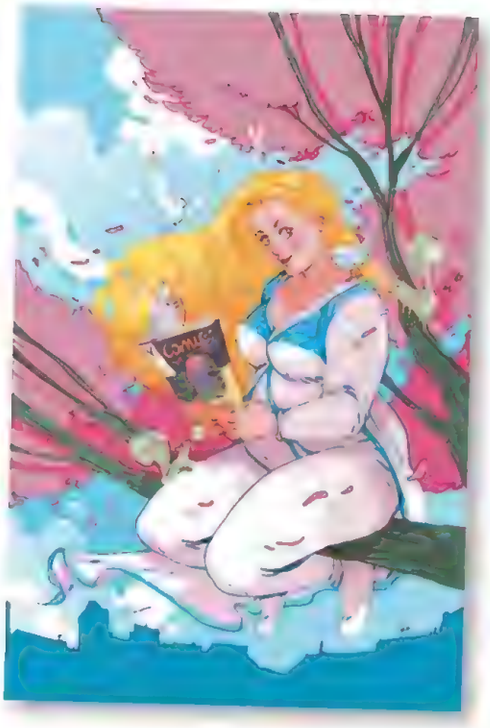
Comic Heroes: Are you pleased with the success of the Faith mini-series?
Jody Houser: It's been very gratifying. I don't think you necessarily expect this kind of response when working on any project, let alone when it's a book you're doing to see if there really was an audience for this character. I fell in love with Faith reading *Harbinger*, but I didn't know how much of a fan favourite she was among Valiant fans, and with so many amazing comics out there competing for readers' attention, you're never quite sure if the book you're working on will find its audience. Luckily, it was never a problem for *Faith*.

CH: What appeals to you most about Faith as a character?
JH: Faith's optimism and geekiness are what stand out the most and make me want to write her. I've heard from a lot of readers who feel the same way about the character. It's good to have representation for more body types in comics but, at the same time, a body type isn't a personality, and there has to be more to her. Luckily, she was already a well-developed character long before I came on board.

CH: Does writing Faith for an ongoing monthly differ much from a mini-series? Are you having to plan sub-plots further ahead?
JH: I'm definitely thinking long-term in what we seed into the story, but at the same time, I want to make sure that each story arc works on its own. Also, the miniseries was about setting up her new life, so a lot of possibility came out of that.

JH: As its title "Hollywood and Vine" indicates, the mini-series sees Faith move to Los Angeles. Is LA a natural home for her?
JH: I've lived in LA for ten years and spent maybe two or three weeks total in New York, so LA is a city I understand a lot better. It's also a place where most people are from somewhere else and looking to get a new start, so tonally it

This page: Faith is depicted very much as an ordinary, if geeky, person who very consciously chooses to use her powers.



Above: Faith is not your usual heroic stereotype either in appearance or in outlook. The title of the series is not her codename, Zephyr, but still might have a significance beyond being her name...

really fits with Faith starting a new era in her life.

CH: Will *Faith*'s supporting cast be expanding, and can we expect to see any guest stars from the rest of the Valiant-verse?
JH: Faith will be getting both new friends and new enemies, including her first real supervillain. As for other Valiant characters, I don't want to give too much away, but we'll definitely be seeing more of her and Archer.

CH: You've written *Agent May* and *The Avengers* for Marvel, and are co-writing *Mother Panic* with Gerard Way for DC's Young Animal imprint later this year. Is there more creative freedom when you're working in a smaller, more close-knit universe like Valiant's?
JH: Having had both kinds of experiences, I have to say that I like doing both. The books I've written for Marvel and DC have been fairly self-contained, so I haven't really had to worry about the breadth and scope of those universes. At the same time, a more focused universe like Valiant's means there are fewer potential conflicts with other books. It's also easier for readers to just jump in and keep up with everything that's going on, on a month-to-month basis.

CH: Is the eclectic range of books at Valiant also important? They range from the futuristic SF of *Rai* to more comedic titles like *Faith*.
JH: That's something I'm trying to keep in mind with *Faith*. We decided very early on when we were doing the mini-series that we wanted to make sure that the book felt unique to the character as opposed to a continuation of *Harbinger*, the team book where she was introduced.

JH: Pere Pérez is pencilling the series, while Marguerite Sauvage will be returning after contributing to the mini-series. What qualities do they both bring to the book?
JH: Marguerite will continue doing the beautiful fantasy sequences like she drew in the mini-series. I think she really brings a unique insight into Faith and her mindset, so she really is an essential part of telling this story. Pere's characterisation and action are both spot-on, and his Faith is an absolute delight to see. He's the perfect choice for a superhero story that is by turns comedic and serious. The book is in wonderful hands.

CH: You and *Archer & Armstrong*'s Rafer Roberts are co-writing a Shadowman special for artist Robert Gill that comes out this month and ties in with Valiant's *4001* summer crossover, which is released this month. Has that been a refreshing change to Faith?
JH: The one-shot has been a fun to work on, and seeing how dire things are on Earth in *4001AD* has been a lot of fun, especially since Rafer and I are both writing somewhat lighter-toned series for Valiant. Rafer has been great to work with, while Robert Gill's art is just stunning, and I've been thrilled to see the pages come in. I hope people dig it! CH

> “Faith's optimism and geekiness are what stand out the most”

DAVID HINE

Second Sight is one of the standout titles from hot new publisher AfterShock's impressive lineup. **Will Salmon** caught up with writer David Hine to find out more about psychic sleuth Ray Pilgrim...

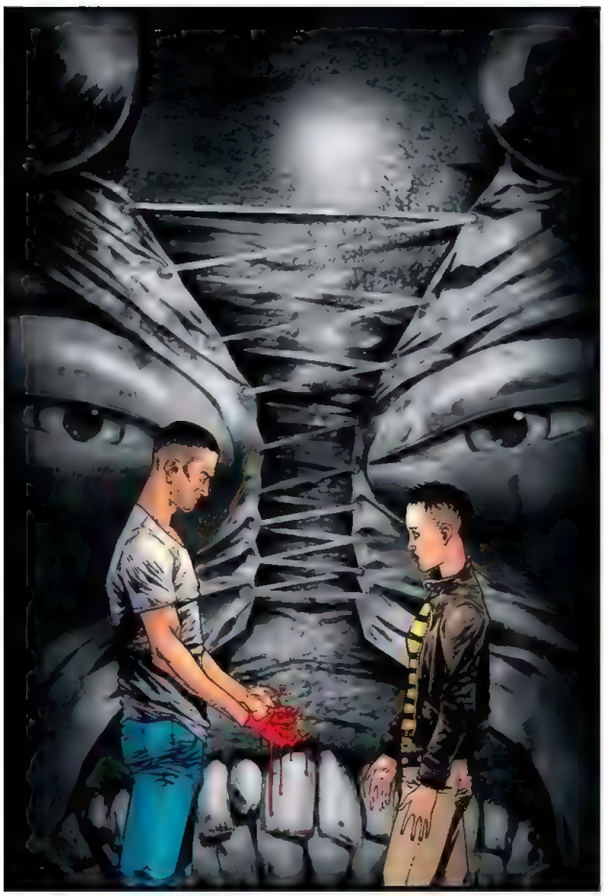
Comic Heroes: What's the premise of *Second Sight*?
David Hine: Ray Pilgrim has the ability to see through the eyes of the most violent psychopaths when they commit their crimes. The story is told in two time periods. Twenty years ago Al the Chemist turned Ray on to a very special species of magic mushroom that triggered those visions. For a while he became a celebrity as he brought two of UK's worst serial killers to justice. But then he got inside the head of a killer and things began to go horribly wrong. In the present he has been forgotten by the public and ignored by the media until his daughter Toni begins to investigate a suspected group of paedophiles...

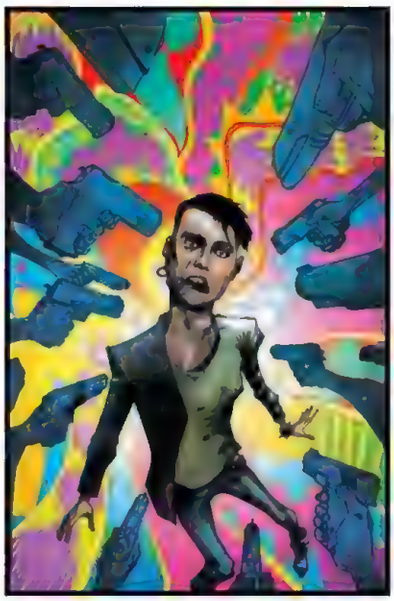
CH: The book has quite a history...
DH: I started on this story over 20 years ago and it has gone through several versions, including a novel. Originally the two time periods were the mid-'70s and the "present day" mid-'90s. The original novels of *Silence Of The Lambs* and *Red Dragon* were big influences but I was also interested in the emergence of new technologies. I've still made that a central theme. We see Ray in the '90s using public phone boxes and wandering the backstreets of Soho to track down the makers of underground porn, while in the present day Toni is focusing on internet and social media. One of my favourite scenes is in issue 5 where he and Toni dump their mobile phones and Toni asks her father how people actually managed to keep in touch before they came into existence. Ray thinks for a moment and then says "I honestly don't remember."

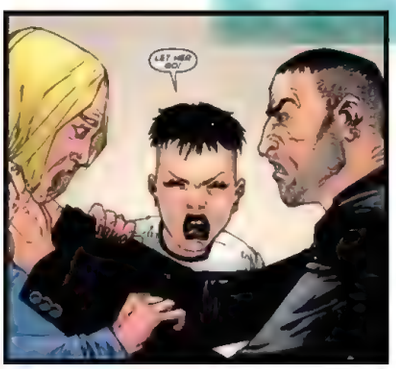
CH: The book deals with psychic powers and remote viewing... Are you interested in the paranormal?
DH: I'm a sceptic. I need hard evidence before I'll believe in anything. However, I do have a rich imaginary life and getting into someone else's head has always been something that has preoccupied me when I write. For me, all writing (and indeed any art form) is an attempt at psychic projection. Art is an opening of the mind, an invitation to the public to poke around in your psyche.

Above: Ray Pilgrim's relationship with his daughter Toni is one of the key engines of the story.

CH: The psychic detective is a well explored sub-genre at this point. How do you make it fresh?
DH: I was worried that psychic detectives have become almost a cliché, but I have a lot of affection for these characters and I felt that the relationship between Ray and Toni was one that would still make an impression. Toni is actually the stronger character and without her, Ray is lost. The theme of the child rescuing the parent from himself is very close to my heart.







CH: Was it difficult writing about subject matter this bleak?
DH: It feels uncomfortable writing some of it but that doesn't bother me. I'd rather be uncomfortable than feel safe with what I write. My experience writing *Crossed* was very similar. There were times when I was horrified by what I was imagining but it's also very cathartic. It purges the soul.

CH: Did real events (Jimmy Savile etc) affect the story's direction?
DH: Didn't we always know about Savile? Certainly by the '70s there was open discussion about his predilections. Rumours of organised child abuse by politicians, members of the aristocracy, police officers and others in positions of authority have been around for decades. Of course we still don't know for sure how much of the rumour will turn out to be true, and there have been cases of unfounded accusations that are essentially witch hunting, particularly of gay celebrities, so I'm careful not to point fingers.

Above: Artist Alberto Ponticelli, who worked on *Unknown Soldier* and *Frankenstein*, is right at home with the supernatural elements in Hine's story.

CH: How does your collaboration with Alberto Ponticelli work?
DH: I write a very detailed script but we also have a lot of interaction. He lives in Italy, so I supply lots of photo reference for the London street scenes, the buses and underground stations, all those things that he won't be familiar with first-hand. That's particularly the case with the scenes set in the '90s. It's important to get the setting authentically English. Alberto is totally into the punk and outsider elements of the story. He seems to have a real empathy for young Ray Pilgrim, and that comes out strongly in the scenes set in the squat party in issue 1.

CH: What qualities does he bring?
DH: He has the ability to act through the characters. Some artists have a stock set of facial expressions that are limited in their effectiveness to communicate the emotions of the characters, but I am quite sure Alberto is grimacing, grinning and gasping along with the characters as he draws them. I've always said that in comics the writer is the director, the artist is the actor.

> It feels uncomfortable writing some of it but I'd rather be uncomfortable than feel safe

CH: How have you found working with AfterShock?
DH: AfterShock have been great to work with. There is a lot of experience there, with Mike Marts and Joe Pruett at the helm. I've been working with Mike since my first forays into mainstream American comics back in 2004 when he was my editor on *District X*. He also brought me into DC to write Batman books. Really there's no one with a broader experience of working on major properties.

CH: What else are you working on?
DH: Lots. I have an ongoing serial in the *Meanwhile* anthology with Mark Stafford. Then we are going into a full-length graphic novel for SelfMadeHero called *Lip Hook*. We recently collaborated on a short story for *Broken Frontier*. I'm also writing the script for the second volume of *Storm Dogs* with Doug Braithwaite for Image. There are a couple of major projects in the pipeline: one of them is another psychedelic noir series and the other is a collaboration with some rather brilliant French artists. CH

IMAGES © DAVID HINE, ART BY ALBERTO PONTICELLI

MATT WAGNER

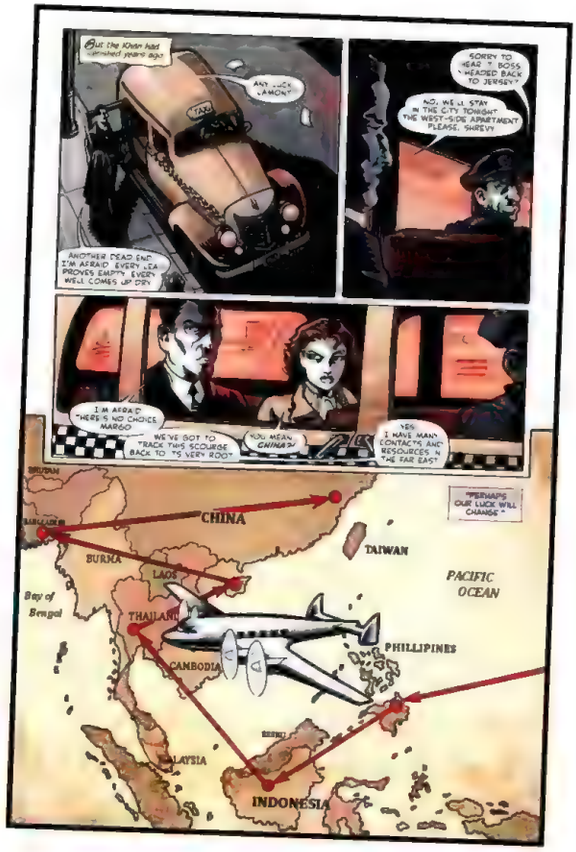
As the veteran artist-writer returns to The Shadow with a pivotal miniseries, he talks to **Joel Meadows** about what we can expect and why he loves pulps...

Comic Heroes: Why are you drawn to the pulpy characters in comics?

Matt Wagner: It's actually a variety of factors. For one, I like the very human scale of these kinda tales... Nothing cosmic or earth-shattering, just extraordinary heroes battling against villainous adversaries. I also like that most of these characters predate the comic-book tropes that have become, I feel, a bit over-cooked. I feel the same way about early Golden-Age comics. They were generated by creators who weren't schooled and steeped in comics narratives and so it all feels fresh and unbridled; what both the comics and the pulps lack in finesse is more than made up for by their chutzpah and vigour.

CH: So as a creator what gives The Shadow its appeal for you?

MW: Well, like I said, there's a lot of freedom. But I've also been a Shadow fan since my early teens. I think I first encountered him in an ad that ran in DC comics back then, announcing their upcoming launch of the now-classic Denny O'Neil/Mike Kaluta run. This was something both old and new to me. My parents were slightly older (WWII generation) and so I'd heard about The Shadow radio show from them. But also, comic-book heroes of those days didn't use guns very often. So this felt significant. I picked up and loved those comics but then I also managed to find recordings of the old radio show on vinyl. It was also around this time that Pyramid Books began releasing a series of paperback reprints of the original pulp novels as well. These all sported incredibly beautiful cover paintings by the legendary Jim Steranko.


But the Khan had vanished years ago
ANY LUCK, LAMONT?
TAXI
SORRY TO HEAR T BOSS HEADED BACK TO JERSEY?
NO, WE'LL STAY IN THE CITY TONIGHT. THE WEST-SIDE APARTMENT PLEASE, SHREVE
ANOTHER DEAD END. I'M AFRAID EVERY LEA PROVES EMPTY. EVERY WELL COMES UP DRY
I'M AFRAID THERE'S NO CHOICE, MARGO
WE'VE GOT TO TRACK THIS SCOURGE BACK TO ITS VERY ROOT
YOU MEAN CHINA?
YES. I HAVE MANY CONTACTS AND RESOURCES IN THE FAR EAST
"PERHAPS OUR LUCK WILL CHANGE"
CHINA
TAIWAN
BURMA
LAOS
PACIFIC OCEAN
Bay of Bengal
THAILAND
PHILLIPINES
CAMBODIA
MALAYSIA
INDONESIA

This page: Wagner returns to The Shadow and Dynamite with five-part miniseries *The Death of Margo Lane*

CH: You worked with your son Brennan on *Shadow: Year One*, also for Dynamite. What made you decide to return to the character one more time to write and draw *The Death of Margo Lane*?

MW: I feel very comfortable with this character and narrative. As I said, I have been a big fan for years and years. My first outing in this

milieu was writing *The Shadow: Year One* and then I both wrote and drew the dream-project pairing of *Grendel Vs The Shadow*. I felt like I wanted to do the same for at least one more solo adventure starring The Shadow. As a character, The Shadow is somewhat static, so *The Death Of Margo Lane* came about as an attempt to shake up the character and his narrative.

CH: Lane's been a pivotal part of The Shadow's world for decades. How does her death affect him?

MW: Margo's been controversial to Shadow fans for quite some time. Although she co-stars in all the radio dramas, she doesn't make an appearance until quite late in the pulp series and doesn't play nearly as large a role. My comic-book version basically seeks to distil elements from every incarnation (even the 1994 Alec Baldwin film) into "my" Shadow. I've always felt it was vital to never be inside The Shadow's head for my tales – we should never see captions of his internal thoughts. Much like Sherlock Holmes, the character works best when we're a bit removed. So, where Holmes had Watson, I've used Margo Lane as the narrator in all of my Shadow tales. Of course, her death would have a huge impact on The Shadow as they are, in fact, also lovers.

CH: Why do you think that in 2016, decades after The Shadow was first created, he still attracts comic readers?

MW: Yeah... He's certainly got a longevity, doesn't he? Again, he's just got all the cool factors sewn up in one terrific package. And I think most pop-culture characters work best in the time period in which they were originally created and intended for. For me, The Shadow doesn't work so well in a modern context. At the very least, he needs to operate in a day and age

Finally, a Mandarin sage he knew offered this bit of wisdom.
BEWARE, MY FRIEND, OF THE HIDDEN SERPENT YOU SEEK TO SMARE
The mysterious despot, Shiwan Khan.

This page: Wagner's son Brennan is colouring his father's art, using an intentionally limited palette designed to evoke the period

when every man on the street was wearing a hat. He also needs to operate in a time when cities still had shadows. And New York in the '30s and '40s was a real high point of American culture in all regards – design, architecture, fashion. Again, the Sherlock Holmes analogy works well here: Holmes was a product of a high point in British culture and influence. I think all those factors add up as to why both of these characters have retained such a fascination for so long.

CH: Your son Brennan has acted as colourist on your art in this series. How closely have you worked together again?

MW: We generally discuss what colour theory would work best at the beginning of any series, even the ones I'm only writing like *Will Eisner's The Spirit*. But Brennan's really talented and has good understanding of colour not only in a rendering sense but also as a tool for storytelling. He really pays attention to the art and the story and his application is really lovely and painterly. He's able to impart a real organic quality even though he's working digitally. For this series, we wanted a limited but not monochromatic palette, something that would feel pulpy and period-evocative. Once we've agreed on a direction, he doesn't really need much more input from me. Luckily, we get along really well.

CH: How much can you tell us about the miniseries?

MW: Well, I don't want to reveal too much. It's five issues long and I'm finding that's the perfect length for this story. Each chapter has a distinct flavour and course of action. I will say that I'm using a decent smattering of The Shadow's many agents in this story arc, so longtime fans will probably enjoy seeing their appearances. CH

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HARLEY
QUINN

This Year's Girl

Harley Quinn brings her unique brand of bonkers to cinemas this summer. In preparation, **Joseph McCabe** has a therapy session with her creators...

Although superheroes dominate the big screen these days, few such box-office champions were created in the last three decades. For every Deadpool there are 20 of Marvel's Avengers, most of whom you can trace at least as far back as the 1970s. And when you take DC's film output into account, there are even fewer newcomers. One child of the '90s, however, has seen her fame rise as high as that of Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman. DC co-publisher Jim Lee calls her "the fourth pillar." And yet if you were to inform Harley Quinn of just how popular she is, she'd most likely laugh in your face... before popping her bubblegum in it.

Most fans who grew up with Harley know that she started conquering contemporary pop culture with her first appearance on 1992's *Batman: The Animated Series*, in the show's first-season episode "Joker's Favor". At first she was merely an irreverent sidekick to the Clown Prince of Crime, garbed in greasepaint and a red-and-black harlequin costume – but viewers were captivated by her from the moment she opened her mouth, out of which emerged a New York accent as tart as tabasco sauce and as nutty as a fruitcake. But just how did Harley enter the world? Where did she come from?

"Well," says her creator, *Batman Animated* producer Paul Dini, when he sits down to lunch with *Comic Heroes*, "rocketed to Earth from the doomed planet Harletron..."

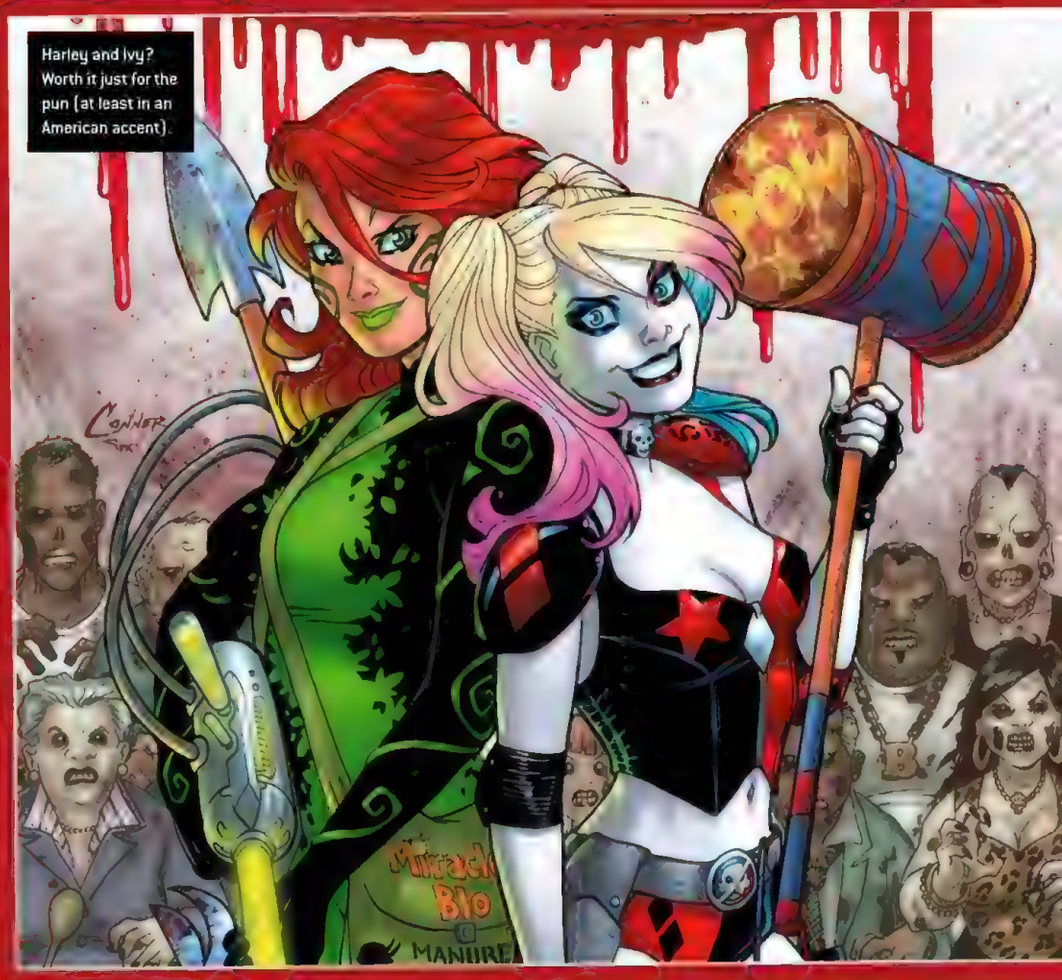
Dini pauses for a moment and laughs. Not so much because he thinks his joke is funny, but because Harley's one of the few characters today who merit such a conceit, as readers of her hit ongoing monthly series well know. "I could actually see [writers] Jimmy [Palmiotti] and Amanda [Conner] doing that. They probably will. It would be like Bizarro World. Guys walking around with blue and red pigtails. Everybody has a mallet with 'YOUR FACE HERE' on it. That's Harley's origin. She probably says, 'I came from a place like the Bizarro World. It was really neat! Everybody looked like me and acted like me. It was wonderful!'"

Of course Harley's inspired more than a few fangirls (and some fanboys) to cosplay as the clown queen of comic books. Small wonder, since from the start Dini made sure she had charisma to spare. The writer says he conceived of Harley shortly after hearing of *Batman: The Animated Series* from producer Alan Burnett... "Alan had come in and was kind of putting together the team he wanted to write and story-edit the episodes. That was the time I first met him, and he'd read my scripts and he liked them, and he wanted me to write a few. So I came up with the idea for 'Joker's Favor', and I was really kind of off on my own in the way I wanted to develop the story. What was really important to the story was, it was about a guy who just happens to lose his temper, make a blunder, and then find out the guy he was yelling at was the Joker. 'Oh my God, this is what happens when I am cruel, when I lose it. Suddenly I'm in deeper than I ever intended!' So I wanted characters around the Joker who could bring out different aspects of him.

"I thought of a girl character. I was thinking of what type she could be, maybe a henchman type. Then I started writing scenes where the Joker made jokes and his henchmen didn't laugh. The girl said something funny and they laughed at her. And the Joker gave them all a nasty look...

OH NO. NOT A SECRET ORIGIN. WHY DON'CHA JUST KILL US INSTEAD?
LEMME GUESS, YOU WERE BORN AVERAGE, BUT AN EXPERIMENT IN AN EGG FACTORY WENT BAD AN' SOME CHEMICAL-PEPPERED EGG STUFF FRIED YOUR BODY AN' ONLY YOUR HEAD SURVIVED AN' NOW YOU'RE MAD AT THE WORLD AND SEEKING REVENGE!
IS IT POSSIBLE YOU WERE ONE OF FIVE CHILDREN BORN WITH AN ODD BIRTH DEFECT WHERE ONLY YOUR HEAD SURVIVED?
The 2014 Annual paired Harley and Poison Ivy...

WOW, TONY! THIS IS AWESOME! I KINDA WISH I WAS GODZILLA, Y'KNOW, SO I COULD JUST STOMP ON EVERYTHING AND SMASH THE HELL OUT OF IT. HOW COOL WOULD THAT BE?
STAY FOCUSED. YOU SHOULD SEE IT ANY MINUTE, KIDDO.
... And amply demonstrated that the character can shine even in very different styles.



I thought, 'That's kind of cool.' So the character became lighter than I was originally planning. I was thinking of her as a rank-and-file henchgirl. Then I thought, 'What's a fun name? Harley's a fun name... Harley Quinn, that's a fun name!' So many of the villains' names are puns or have double meanings or something like that. I also made the character very wisecracky and very snappy."

Key to Harley's initial success was a New York accent and an attitude to rival that of Bugs Bunny (to whose legacy Dini also contributed when he wrote for Warner's *Tiny Toon Adventures*). Her voice was provided by actress-comedian Arleen Sorkin.

"Arleen Sorkin was a good friend of mine, and she was doing a lot of TV stuff, and that was sort of her persona, the bubbly blonde," Dini explains. "I went to Andrea Romano, our voice director, and I said, 'Well, what about Arleen? She can do this kind of thing. The character can probably sound like Judy Holliday or Ellen Greene in *Little Shop of Horrors*, have some sort of wisecracky element to it.' Andrea said, 'Fine. I'll try her out.' She came in, did the part really well, and suddenly the voice really worked with the model and the writing to create this character who was a little different from the tone of the show."

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Just how different Harley was from the Caped Crusader's world at that period would become evident over time. In the wake of Frank Miller's trendsetting 1986 miniseries *The Dark Knight Returns* and Tim Burton's blockbuster Batman movies, there was little room for levity in Gotham City.

"Batman is dark and he's serious, and elements of his world have to be that way," explains Dini. "The Joker represents a lightness but he's not really funny. Then Harley comes in and sets it on its ear a little bit by being an element that's not really there. Catwoman is the forbidden love – she'll always be the forbidden girlfriend for Batman. Poison Ivy is the seductress – he's never gonna have a willing relationship with Poison Ivy. But Harley Quinn is just an imp. Just a screwball. Somebody who's gotten lost in life and is a pain in the ass and a lost soul to him. Yet she might have her use because she's got this thing with the Joker. 'Maybe I can use that to my advantage,' he thinks. So there's no love between them. But that said, they can certainly be a big part of each other's life as adversaries or occasional frenemies or allies out of necessity. So she does add to the world, and she does bring something."

Batman Animated co-creator Bruce Timm also brought something, when he designed Harley's costume – after rejecting Dini's original idea for the look of the character.

"Paul initially had a completely different look in mind for her," Timm later tells *Comic Heroes*. "In his head he kind of had a '60s, Adam-West-style, kooky harlequin kind of idea. He actually did a rough sketch of her. I looked at that and went, 'No, we're not doing that.' So I just did some research on harlequin outfits, and did a kind of simplified, stripped-down, streamlined superhero version of the classic harlequin outfit. With the >

> "PAUL HAD A '60S ADAM WEST STYLE KOOKY LOOK IN MIND. I SAID NO, WE'RE NOT DOING THAT

"THERE IS THIS BOND. SHE'LL BE WITH THIS GUY TILL THE END"

ruffles and the jester hat and the white greasepaint and the diamond pattern. Alternating red and black actually kind of comes from the comics, particularly the Golden Age Daredevil character, the Lev Gleason version, who had a red and black alternating costume. I think that's where I got that motif from."

With her look, personality and voice in place, Harley won hordes of new admirers each time she appeared on *Batman: The Animated Series*, starring in fan-favourite episodes like "Harley and Ivy" and "Harley's Holiday". Eventually, she earned her own origin story in the one-shot comic book *The Batman Adventures: Mad Love*. Written by Dini and illustrated by Timm, it won the 1994 Eisner Award for Best Single Story, and its tale of Harley's transformation from psychiatrist to supervillain later became an episode of the show.

"Harley Quinn started off as a very determined, very driven young doctor," recalls Dini, "a psychiatrist who was fascinated by the bizarre criminals that seemed to haunt Gotham City. She also recognised that these guys were notorious and newsworthy, and might make good subjects for exposé books. Even at that early age she did have a little bit of a selfish side, and a little bit of a manipulative side. But I don't think she was completely meretricious, I think she did think, at least at that point, 'I could be the one to cure the Scarecrow or the Joker. Or figure out what this creepy Batman guy is all about.'

"Joker looked at her and saw her coming, basically. 'I think there's something to this kid that I can work with...' Early on he figured out that she had an Achilles heel, and that was a rather tender heart, and a belief that she could unravel what was human about someone. The Joker manipulated her, and I think he found her kind of interesting. He did appreciate the fact that she was intelligent and that she was brainy and had an agenda. It became a game of cat and mouse a bit.

"He definitely was looking at her as a means to an end," adds Dini. "But I think he was kind of surprised by her now and then, and maybe looked at her as something more than a willing accomplice, someone to flirt with, a henchperson. I think maybe there had never really been anybody in his life who wanted to settle in for the whole ride. I think on some level he appreciates that."

To illustrate the couple's unique partnership, Dini cites a story he did

HARLEY'S REBIRTH

Jimmy Palmiotti on co-writing the new DC Rebirth Harley Quinn book with Amanda Conner.

Will Harley Quinn differ significantly under DC Rebirth compared to previous runs?
At its core, no, because DC is happy with what Amanda and I are doing so they've told us to just continue. The supporting cast will be more involved in the series and we will be seeing a lot more Poison Ivy and Powergirl, as well as the Joker, as the year goes on.

What do you attribute Harley's huge popularity to?
Timing, as well as taking the character in a direction where she steps out on her own. We've taken the time to define who she is outside of the Joker's relationship with her. We have developed her personality, her sexuality, and created a new supporting cast that compliments the character.

She's almost become DC's Deadpool, and fans have really embraced her...
She's one of the few characters where a costume change every issue is a normal thing! We love to mix it up as much as we can in the book, and we love all the Harley cosplay.

Tell us about the first DC Rebirth arc, "Die Laughing"...
It starts with an alien crash landing on Earth and quickly goes on to some bad meat turning people into zombies. We have everything, and everyone, involved in trying to stop the infected people in Coney Island. Within the story, we see Harley continue to establish her relationships with Ivy and everyone around her. It's fun and scary, and a bit violent as expected. Our artists, Chad Hardin and Alex Sinclair, are on fire. The art has never looked better.

Are you taking any lead from Harley's portrayal in the Suicide Squad film?
We matched Harley's hair colour but we figure it should always be the movies that take the lead from the comics! So we are keeping on doing our thing and letting the film people see what we are doing and we'll let them apply it as they find inspiration. **Stephen Jewell**

A peek at the all new DC Rebirth Harley Quinn ongoing book.

not write but enjoys as a fan: "I think one of the best depictions of their relationship was in Brian Azzarello and Lee Bermejo's graphic novel *Joker*. There's a scene where this henchman, who's become kind of close to the Joker, is going through their hideout. At one point he walks by an open door, and inside is the Joker and Harley. Harley's there and she's got a drink and maybe a cigarette, and she's just sort of sitting there. The Joker is huddled in her lap; his eyes are open and he's been crying and he's just clinging to her. It's a very interesting interpretation of Harley. She never speaks during the book. We never hear the snappy voice. But there's something about that scene. When I saw it I thought, 'That nails it. That nails it in a way that I never quite did.' Where there's total acceptance on her part. That she will be with this guy till the end. They're together in that moment and there is this bond between them. Which isn't the lovey-dovey romance, the kind of cutesy stuff, but it is something very solid."

CAPTURING THE APPEAL

In this summer's Suicide Squad film, Harley will at long last make her big-screen debut (played by Margot Robbie) alongside her "Mister J" (played by Jared Leto), and Dini is optimistic that it will highlight the couple's bond. "In the movie, it seems that they're portraying the Joker more like a decadent rock star or a very street gangster or something. I've equated them to Sid Vicious, to Sid and Nancy, a couple of times, and I think there is an element of that to their relationship. It's much more that than it is the '60s relationship of the Cesar Romero Joker with a rotating henchgirl in his gang of girls. It's something a little more dark and desperate than that. When they go that route for the movie, I think they're on to something."

The one-shot *Mad Love* is an engrossing mix of the cartoony and the chilling.

With Harley now poised to win a new legion of fans across the globe, Timm remains dumbfounded by her steady rise to fame. "I'm pleased by it, obviously. It's really cool to see that many people interested in her. Maybe it's because of how different she is from all the other superheroes or famous female characters. She really is kind of unique in that regard. Because she's really unpredictable and really weird and really funny, and has this kind of weird and uncomfortable backstory. In the comics they've detached her so much from the Joker that she really is kind of her own person now."

The artist laughs. "But I kind of scratch my head when people say, 'What's the appeal of Harley Quinn?' I'm like, 'The hell if I know!'" CH

Truly great characters have depths that other creators can explore in many ways.

SQUAD GOALS

With a Suicide Squad movie on the way, creator John Ostrander takes **Joseph McCabe** back to the birth of an unlikely legend

SQUAD GOALS

The Suicide Squad. There's nothing in comic books quite like it. A ragtag band of super-powered prisoners recruited by cagey, feisty government operative Amanda Waller, the Squad's popularity has, in recent years, exploded well beyond the confines of comic books – into TV, animated movies, video games, and, this summer, its very first live-action feature film.

Much of the credit for the Suicide Squad's success, however, is due to comic book writer John Ostrander, who introduced the current version of the team in his very first assignment for DC Comics, the 1987 miniseries *Legends*. Ostrander plotted the six-issue series, scripted by Len Wein and pencilled by John Byrne. However, as he told *Comic Heroes*, the Squad (alias Task Force X) was not actually the first team of characters he wanted to work with when he joined the company.

"I had wanted to do Challengers of the Unknown," says Ostrander, referring to the famed DC book created in the 1950s by the legendary Jack Kirby. "I loved that title. I just think it's one of the best titles in comics. But somebody else had dibs on that. So editor Robert Greenberger said, 'Well, look, we've got this other title here. It only appeared in five issues of *Showcase*. You can do whatever you want with it. It's called Suicide Squad."

"My first reaction," laughs the writer, "was, 'Suicide Squad?! What a stupid name! Who in their

I'D KILL YOU BATS, FOR THE SHEER PLEASURE OF IT...
IF YOU COULD'VE YOU WOULDN'T BE NOW
OR AREN'T YOU AWARE THAT YOU PULL YOUR SHOTS AROUND HIS?
I WON'T GIVE OUR SECRET IDENTITY ANY IMPORTANCE TO US, BATMAN. JUST AS IMPORTANT AS YOURS IS TO YOU
WE KNOW HOW YOU GOT IN HERE. WE KNOW WHAT ALONG YOU USED AND WHO HELPED YOU
YOU DIDN'T WEAR GLOVES IN THAT CELL, BATMAN. WE GOT A NICE SET OF PRINTS
I PROMISE YOU THAT IF YOU BLOW THIS WHISTLE ON US, I'LL... FIND OUT WHO YOU ARE AND DO THE SAME BY YOU
GIVE ME THE TAPE AND YOUR WORD NOT TO SAY A WORD OF THIS TO ANYONE AND IT ALL GETS WIPED
DO YOU EXPECT ME TO JUMP SUCH A VOW?
VERY WELL... DO GO ON.
I'LL FIND ANOTHER WAY OF BRINGING YOU DOWN
HE'S ALONE.
Not many people stand up to Batman. Amanda Waller is one of those rare people.

...IT'S MY NEW JOB.
YOU THREE ARE THE LAST ONES STANDING WHICH IS UNFORTUNATE, BECAUSE NONE OF YOU ARE LAPAZ...
WHICH ONE OF YOU IS GONNA TELL ME WHERE HE IS?
POP
FIFTY-FIFTY CHANCE, HERE...WHICH ONE OF YOU GETS TO LIVE?
DO YOU KNOW WHO WE ARE?! IF YOU THINK WE'RE GOING TO GIVE UP CHE--
YOU'VE GOT A MOUTH ON YOU
...YOU'LL BREAK EASIER
POP
"HEADING TO THE EXTRACTION POINT..."
Not so much dark heroes as villains let loose to do their thing – always intriguing.

IMAGES © DC COMICS.

right mind would belong to something that would call itself a Suicide Squad? I mean, "Join us and die!"' But I got to thinking about who would join something called Suicide Squad. Why they would join it. Then the idea came – maybe they don't have a choice. Maybe there's some reason why they have to belong to it. I started thinking, 'Well, who would that apply to?' Then I thought, 'OK, prisoners might work with that.' DC had all these great supervillains who could be used in a case like that. I went, 'Hmmm...' So combining that along with *Mission: Impossible* and *The Dirty Dozen*, the whole idea started to take shape."

Since the Squad needed a director, Ostrander created Waller, and made her unlike any other team leader in superhero comics. "Amanda Waller is the person who put together this new squad. I wanted someone who did not have superpowers themselves, but was as tough as nails; and I wanted someone of a type that hadn't been seen much. So I thought, 'Female. African-American. Middle-aged. Heavyset.' I wanted the weight because I thought size would give the impression of will. Because that's what would drive her. You had to get the sense that she was powerful. She was called the 'The Wall,' and she even looked a little like a wall.

"With Amanda," he adds, "I never thought that she was a villain herself. An antihero? Absolutely. But I never saw her as evil. She always had a very real reason for doing what she was doing. It really was about not just her power but getting the job done. And that the job was worth doing. Given her background, she didn't mind using the bad guys, because she and her family had suffered at the hands of bad people. So she's not terribly sympathetic towards them. If they die along the way, well, too damn bad."

> "I THOUGHT IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT MEMBERS DIED AND DIDN'T COME BACK"

In *Legends* and the *Suicide Squad* comic book that followed it, Ostrander filled Waller's team with a roster of longtime DC villains who met a specific set of criteria he devised, including such favourites as Flash foe Captain Boomerang and Batman baddie Deadshot.

"At that time, DC had the *Who's Who In The DC Universe*, and I paged through it to see who looked interesting. Deadshot

came in because I liked the look of his costume, which had been designed by Marshall Rogers for stories that he and [writer] Steve Englehart did; and also the fact that the character hadn't been really developed. He was open to my interpretation and how I wanted to do it. We could also grab him and other people would not be calling for his use. We could control him a little bit. I think that was key too, in terms of a lot of the characters that I wanted to get ahold of. 'Can they be ours? Can I do some stuff with them that hasn't been done before? Can I kill them off?' Those were some of the criteria that I used in terms of the Squad. Because I thought it was important if you're gonna have something called Suicide Squad, that members died and didn't come back next week. When we killed 'em, we killed 'em."

The original series ended in June 1992 after a very respectable 66 issues.

Jim Lee's ace cover for the first issue of the new DC Rebirth *Suicide Squad*.

POWER WOMAN

Does Ostrander find it ironic that the same characters once viewed as disposable are now featuring in a blockbuster movie before some of DC's iconic mainstays have made their big-screen debut?

"All I wanted to have was some interesting characters," he tells us. "I suppose that's why they have been developed and have been useful to people in other media, including some of the animated films and games. Because I developed characters so they were interesting and had character traits that would translate well."

In the case of Waller, Ostrander's work has translated very well indeed. The Wall has played a key role in, among other productions, TV's animated *Justice League*, the *Batman: Arkham Origins* video game, and the *Batman: Assault on Arkham* animated film (all three of these versions of the character being voiced by C.C.H. Pounder). She's also appeared as a recurring character in TV's *Arrow* and in the *Green Lantern* film, in which she was played by Oscar nominee Angela Bassett. In the *Suicide Squad* film, she's played by another Oscar nominee: Viola Davis.

"She's been a popular character," Ostrander admits, "I think because she's a useful character and a compelling one. People who know my stuff know that I like to play not with black-and-white but with shades of grey. So a lot of my characters float back and forth between good and bad. I find that to be more true of people in general to begin with. If that's true in real life it will feel more true when you read them."

As for Ostrander's preferred screen version of Waller... "I can't say I have a favourite, because I just love seeing her up there. But C.C.H. Pounder did a wonderful job. Not only is her voice right, but she herself physically and visually was terrific. But I have to admit... I've seen Viola Davis in the trailers – and all I've seen is the trailers – and the first time I saw her was in the first trailer. I thought, 'My God!' She looked like Amanda, she sounded like Amanda, she had Amanda's attitude, and what she was saying in the trailer could have been lifted straight out of the comic."

"I was in love," laughs the creator.

THE NEW TEAM

Stephen Jewell talks to Rob Williams, the writer charged with leading the DC Rebirth incarnation of Suicide Squad

Comic Heroes: The new comic debuts around the same time as the film. Are you taking any leads from the movie?
Rob Williams: We felt it would be prudent to use the core Squad from the movie. They're the characters people are going to expect to see, though we have a few wrinkles, as you'll see, including one really big one. Our book is very much its own story, but if you love the movie you'll see a similar tone. Aside from that we're following our own punkish path.

CH: Harley Quinn is one of DC's breakout stars of the past few years, and is in this book. Will you be taking a more humorous approach than previous runs?
RW: Harley's inherently funny but the thing that elevates her is how intelligent she is. She was a psychotherapist, so there's a lot of smarts there.

CH: Does the fact that Suicide Squad are villains make them very different to other teams like the Justice League?
RW: The theme of any Suicide Squad book is really "can bad guys be good?" Well, they can and will if they have explosive devices inserted in their brains to keep them under control. There's some not-so-subtle political satire to be had from such an operation being a covert aspect of US security. And the revolving roster is kind of necessary when you consider that they go on suicide missions, as not everyone will be coming back.

CH: Jim Lee is alternating pencilling duties on *Suicide Squad* with Philip Tan. Does art get any better than that?
RW: Well, anyone who has seen Jim's work over the past 20-plus years will be aware that he is one of the most dynamic artists in comics. He brings bombastic energy, amazing-looking characters, tech and action sequences that jump off the page and punch you in the face. It's A-list comics, and Philip is very much of the same school as Jim, and they're working closely together.

STRANGEWAYS, HERE WE COME

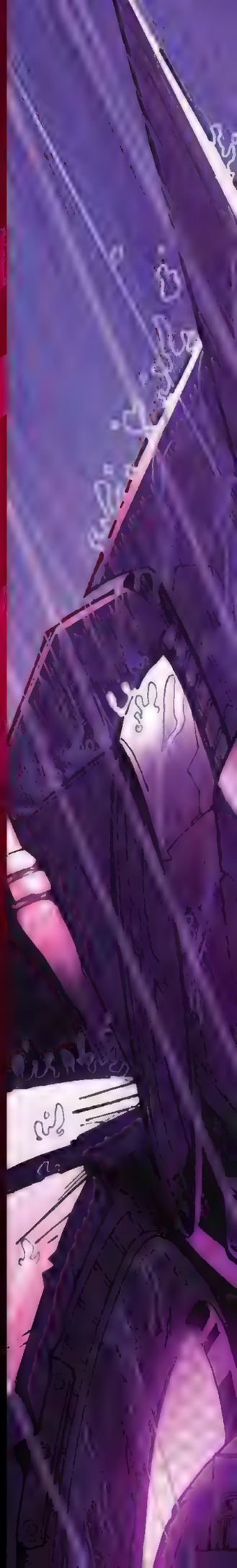
GRAHAM KIBBLE-WHITE TELLS THE UNLIKELY STORY OF HOW JAMES ROBERTS COMBINED SHAPE-CHANGING ROBOTS WITH EXHILARATING SCI-FI, TRUE LOVE, MIND-BENDING COMEDY AND JANGLY INDIE POP, TO CREATE A MODERN CLASSIC

Here is a comic that explores issues of identity, ideology, fidelity and sexuality – and it reads like one of those epic, writer-room-fuelled US TV serials. At turns it can be hilarious, moving, gruelling and thrilling. And it's certainly one of the best series currently being published.

But it's also a toy tie-in, featuring the Hasbro-owned robots who change shape into muscle cars and monster trucks.

The comic in question is IDW's *Transformers: More Than Meets The Eye* by British writer James Roberts. Although he's an old-school fan of the characters – who cites Marvel UK's weekly *Transformers* comic (1984-91) as a formative influence – even he admits the brand can come between him and potential readers.

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't frustrated at the way Transformers is still perceived by, if you like, rank and file



comic readers," he tells *Comic Heroes*. "Because I'd like to think *MTMTE* would appeal to someone who picks up titles by the big two, but also someone who focuses on the indie stuff, like *Lumberjanes*. It's just getting over that barrier..."

Gradually, he's been doing that. In 2015, *MTMTE* picked up two Comic Alliance awards, and featured in Comic Resources' top 100 books of the year. This February it hit the mainstream, with Graeme Virtue of *The Guardian* taking notice: "*MTMTE*'s vivid characterisation, self-referential humour and wicked habit of unexpectedly killing off beloved characters has made it the buzziest of cult favourites."

The buzziest of cult favourites. That sounds about right. But where did it all begin? Jump back to 2012, when IDW was overhauling its seven-year-old Transformers line and launching two new continuing titles – *Transformers: Robots In Disguise*, written by the range's editor John Barber, and *More Than Meets The Eye* by Roberts. Their arrival marked a brave new world. The war between the Autobots and Decepticons had been brought to a close, dismantling one of the original pillars of the mythos in a move that, contrary to comics orthodoxy, still doesn't look like it's going to be reset, some four years on.

> The key to Roberts's approach is taking the characters and their world perfectly seriously, letting events play out logically.

> **"IT'S MY ATTEMPT TO DO IT RIGHT, TO BE RUTHLESSLY FAITHFUL TO THE INTERNAL LOGIC OF THE STORY"**

PLAYFUL ADVENTURE

While Barber's comic (which later dropped the subtitle) detailed the political difficulties of maintaining this new status quo at home, Roberts took a bunch of b-list 'bots, threw them onto a spaceship (the

PRIME MOVER

We asked Simon Furman – main writer of the original 1980s Marvel UK Transformers comic which inculcated James Roberts' love for the characters – to give us his take on MTMTE...

"I love that James refuses to treat *More Than Meets The Eye* as anything other than a compelling character-led comic book that always seems to be reaching outwards, becoming grander in scale and scope and 'big' ideas, while never losing the focus on the smaller, more personal trials and tribulations that we can all relate to.

"Back in the day, we took pains not to write about robots, but rather about the unique individuals that made up the cast, with all their flaws, eccentricities and quirks, and James has very much kept up that tradition. But whereas we were largely channelling our love of other comic books and properties, James is of the generation that grew up with the original line o Transformer characters and has a broad knowledge base of, and affection for, those stories, which he turns into sly, subtle references and crowd-pleasing moments.

"However, James knows to craft his own story and character dynamics first and foremost, and then kind of layer in his 'Easter egg' stuff, so the latter never gets in the way of the former – just provides a comfortable, familiar context for the new tales he's telling.

"More than I ever did on the weekly, James has made MTMTE his own. It's very uniquely his narrative form, his voice, and his humour that makes it such a fan favourite. I can't imagine anyone else continuing it. So, if this is a case of James running with a torch that I maybe lugged around with me for a while, then I think he's not only succeeded but exceeded all expectations. It never ends."

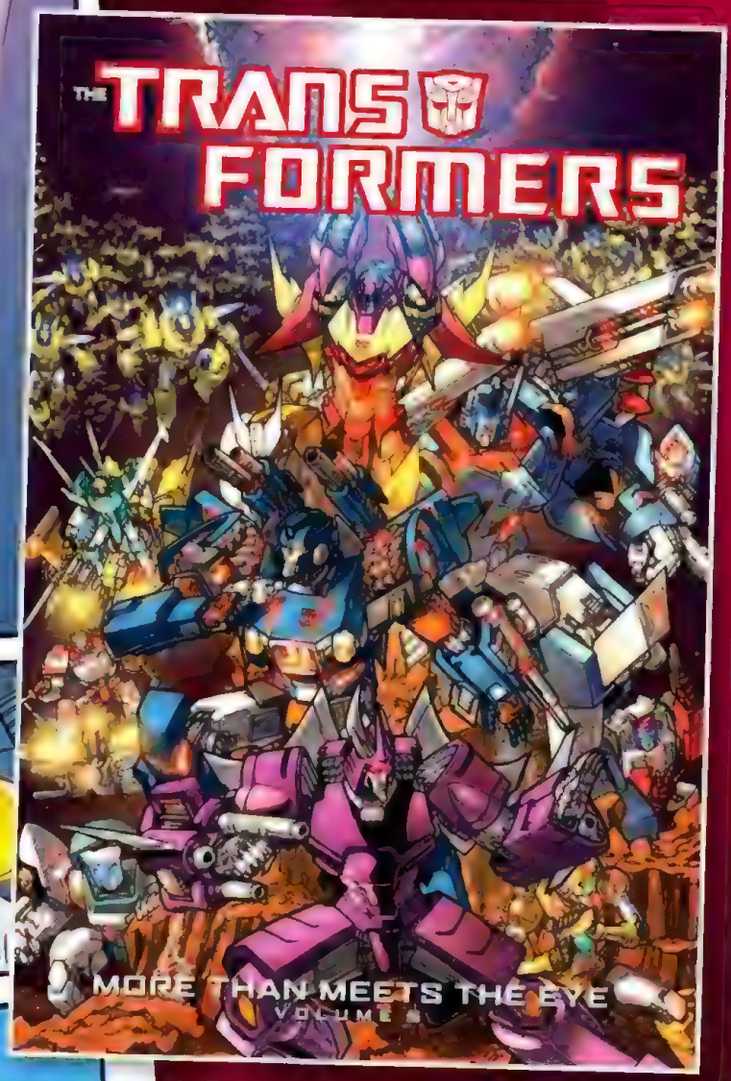
Above: The subscribers' cover by Nick Roche and Josh Burcham for #42, showing Nautica at a dance party, reflects the way that *MTMTE*'s focus is on character at least as much as action.

Lost Light), and sent them off on a spurious quest to find the mythical Knights of Cybertron.

Although *MTMTE* is essentially an action-adventure title, some stories have played out like superior episodes of *Red Dwarf*, with the characters getting into high-concept scrapes – such as encountering "charisma parasites" or a hologram replica of Earth constructed from sitcom references. While Roberts admits that he occasionally pushes some of his readers beyond their comfort zone – "and I can see why one might think it indulgent to end a story with what can only be described as an indie disco!" – he's also adamant that the series' DNA remains "inherently playful."

The imagination and sheer joined-up-ness of his approach means *MTMTE* has been able to bring us one of comics' greatest ever time-travel adventures. "That was my attempt to do that kind of plot right, actually, and to be ruthlessly faithful to the internal logic of the story," Roberts says. Fittingly, the tale began before *MTMTE* was even running, with a two-parter he wrote in 2011, published during a regular run of Transformers comics. "That was set in pre-war Cybertron, and explored the origins of Optimus Prime and Megatron," he explains. Roberts revisited the period again in a 2012 *MTMTE* flashback story. Then, two years on, he began the "Elegant Chaos" three-parter, which saw some of the Lost Light

REWIND– MY LOVE– IT'S NOT FOR ME TO SAY
BUT THIS AFFECTS BOTH OF US. IF I DON'T DO THIS HERE NOT KNOWING, WE COULD SPEND THE NEXT FOUR MILLION YEARS SEARCHING FOR SOMEONE WHO'S
I KNOW BUT AT LEAST WE'D BE DOING IT TOGETHER
I JUST HIT "SEARCH"
DOMINUS AMBUS OF AMBUSTUS MINOR STATUS: DEACTIVATED



crew journey back to that era. "In comics, I've always wanted a tale where years down the line, time travel is involved, and literally the pages from the original run are reinserted into the book you're reading now. That works best if you've got the same creative team – which we did. So we were able to have a bumper-sized issue, which literally recycled pages from those earlier stories but re-contextualised, so you were flowing into those scenes in a different way."

It's this meticulous detail that pays dividends for long-term readers, something that's been integral to *MTMTE* since the beginning. At the end of issue one, when the Lost Light has departed Cybertron, a mysterious, half-broken warning message crackles out. It's never referred to again until issue 38 and the end of "Elegant Chaos", when we actually witness the time-travelling robots recording said missive – with missing parts now revealed.

Above: Readers who know Transformers only from the 1980s Marvel UK series might be bemused by some of the developments, but that run was a key influence on *MTMTE*.

EMBRACE THE ABSURD

The comic is equally vigorous in its exploration of character, and one of its delights is the way Roberts is able to celebrate everything he's always loved about Transformers while also encompassing their intrinsic ridiculousness. "To make the stories work, you've got to fundamentally believe in the premise, even if it's inherently... silly," he says. Think of how Russell T. Davies (a writing inspiration for Roberts) reinvented *Doctor Who*, and you'll find a similar mix of adoration and pragmatism. Al Kennedy, co-host of

STORIES RIFFED ON TRANSFORMATION AS A FACET OF THEIR ALIEN SPECIES

the clever and scabrous House To Astonish podcast – and a long-time *MTMTE* advocate – puts it best: "The basic concept of transforming robots is both completely fundamental to *MTMTE* (a lot of the scenarios spin directly out of that) and often completely irrelevant (in that the drama which plays out within those scenarios comes from universal emotional and character elements)."

Because of his background in fandom, Roberts is armed with both the required sense of entitlement and the urge to be radical, which allows him to really interrogate his subjects. "If you asked me ten years ago, I think I would have written Transformers stories from a very purist perspective," he confesses. "There is a view within fandom that you can make the characters too human. You can lose something of their essence. But if you were going to pursue that robotic side to the Nth degree, they wouldn't have noses, they wouldn't have chairs..."

From quirky, engaging characters to a dance party, *MTMTE* resolutely explores all the facets of its basic question, "What would this universe be like?"

BRAINSTORM'S WORKSHOP.
BY THE TIME NAUTICUS THE RATHER MINIMUS HAD FULLED HIMSELF FROM THE WRECKAGE, I WAS TOO LATE. OUR MOULDING KILLER WAS GONE.
OH NO. WHERE? WHERE'S HE RIGHT NOW? WE CAN'T HAVE GOT FAR.
ACTUALLY MEGS, IT LOOKS LIKE ABOUT FOUR MILLION YEARS AWAY.
SAY THAT AGAIN.
WE THINK—
PERCEPTOR THINKS—
—BECAUSE THE EQUATION HE'S BEEN TOLD TO USE BY YOU APPARENTLY SUGGESTS
—THAT BRAINSTORM HAS TRAVELLED BACK IN TIME
HM.
DID YOU JUST ?
HM.
I—
THIS CONVERSATION IS RIDICULOUS
S CKLD NO RUSH
YOU ARE RIDICULOUS.
EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED IN THE LAST FEW DAYS IS INTENSELY RIDICULOUS.
SAY YA WHO INTO THIS SHAMBLES OF A QUEST— A MONTH-LONG AND NOT A DAY OUTS BUT AN HOUR WHEN I ONLY HAVE TO STEP BACK FROM THIS ENDLESS PARADE OF NONSENSE
AND BY NOT MYSELF BY MEANS OF SEVERAL BLOWS TO THE HEAD THAT I AM HERE OF MY OWN VOLITION AND NOT AS THE RESULT OF SOME ELABORATE TRAP SET BY CATALYNS PRIME
AND ANOTHER LOOKING FOR THE INSIGHTS OF CYBERTRONY WHY HOST IS ME MY TRIALS I'VE ALREADY BEEN CONVICTED AND THIS IS MY PUNISHMENT YOU TWO SHIP! FOR LIFE!

In humanising his crew, Roberts has paradoxically been able to dig deeper into their mechanics. "Something that will always make them alien is their nature of being bimodal, having an alternate form. A lot of the stories in *MTMTE* have riffed on transformation as a facet of their species."

One innovation that flowed from this in *MTMTE* is its coining of "functionism". This is a mode-based apartheid wherein whatever

it is that a robot transforms into determines its social mobility. "If you happen to share an 'alt mode' with millions of others, there's the rule of ubiquity, and you'll have a lesser standing than someone who can turn into, for example, a particle accelerator. There's also a disposable class, those who become things like laser pointers, which have been superseded as technology evolves. What happens to them?"

Roberts's enquiries have even looked at aspects of gender and sexuality – resulting in the book's most successful ongoing storyline.

> "I WANTED TO DO SOMETHING THAT'S NEVER BEEN DONE"

The series time travel storyline is built on solid sci-fi, with a determination (as James Roberts puts it) "to do it right."

"That's a whole new kettle of fish for Transformers," he says. "With the original line of toys, and in the old cartoon series, all the characters were male-coded in the sense that they had masculine voices and the default personal pronoun was 'he'.

"Let me stress that I'm not linking gender to biology, but what does it mean for Transformers to self-identify as 'he'?"

Teasing out that thought-experiment, early issues carefully delineated two of the Lost Light crew – Chromedome and Rewind – as being in a relationship analogous to marriage. "The culmination of that – and I won't go into too much detail because, obviously, people are going to want to rush out and buy *MTMTE* issue 16 after reading this! – was one saying to the other, 'I love you'."

The moment is given more power because, between the two characters, it's actually nothing revelatory. "It was not the first time it had ever been said, it was the first time it had been said on the page."

Alert to the possibility that this development might be challenging for his bosses at IDW and Hasbro, Roberts pre-empted criticism by laying out his arguments in a letter entitled *The case for "I love you"*. In part, it read:

The words represent the absolute culmination of a narrative arc – and a relationship – that I've been carefully, patiently building for 16 issues [...] At the risk of sounding precious, this does mean a lot to me. I've always wanted to do something in a Transformers story that's never been done before. This meets that criterion.

NEW PERSPECTIVES

"I needn't have bothered," Roberts reflects today. "It was met with no resistance at all." The same is true within the fiction of the comic – "There's never been a scene, nor will there be, where other characters find it a remarkable thing that these two are together". It's even true among the readership. "Well, there's been a tiny amount of people for whom it wasn't to their tastes," clarifies Roberts. "But overwhelmingly, not only

Ultra Magnus teaches Tailgate the Autobot Code, in this playful cover for *MTMTE* #5 by Nick Roche and Joana Lafuente.

REVOLUTION!

James Roberts talks us through IDW's upcoming transformative event

"In the autumn, IDW are staging a comics event – Revolution – a five-part mini-series that brings a variety of their other Hasbro properties into the Transformers universe. I think the idea is that G.I. Joe has always been part of it, but we will learn that M.A.S.K., Rom, Micronauts and Action Man – also co-exist.

"As far as the story of the Lost Light and the quest is concerned, that's going to continue pretty much unchanged, because a lot of these characters and scenarios are Earth-based, so they don't necessarily connect. But there will definitely be scope for some of the space-based creations, like Rom, to crossover."

Stop press! IDW has just confirmed that, as part of Revolution, MTMTE will cease with issue 57, to be succeeded by a new title and issue one in the autumn – still helmed by Roberts – which is designed as the ideal jumping on point for new readers.

have most been accepting of it, it's brought in new readers. That's a fact."

Cogitating a little more on the theme, does this mean that Transformers' society is, ergo, a homo-normative one? "Yeah. I think it's fair to say that. From my perspective, that's an accurate categorisation which had been applied retroactively. It's the simplest way to look at it, and I've never had any pushback from Hasbro. Although, as far as I know, they've also never explicitly said that this is how it is."

As this edition of *Comic Heroes* goes to press, there's a huge change ahead in the IDW Transformers universe (see "Revolution" on this page), but even before that, 16 of *MTMTE*'s best-loved characters – including a reformed Megatron – are facing their Zulu Dawn in a dilapidated fortress on a dead planet. If Roberts remains true to form, the next couple of issues, which mark the conclusion of what he dubs "Season Two" of his comic, are going to be insanely clever and absolutely heart-wrenching.

Presumably, the Lost Light will continue on its quest. Somehow. But what about Roberts? Does he ever feel constrained by his eccentric cast of characters? "Although they're very human, there are limits," he concedes. And while there's still huge mileage in detailing the travails of "near-immortal creatures, the majority of whom have only ever known violence," he does also admit to looking at "so-called boutique comics, where there's a real lightness of touch and a joyous realism in how the characters speak. One that's greatly informed by being able to make casual pop cultural references to films or songs. That's not so easy to do with robots."

Isn't it? Indie disco, anyone...? *Oh, there is a light and it never goes out, There is a light and it never goes out...*

CATCHING FIRE

Joe Hill's new novel might not sound like a superhero story, but that's actually what it is. **David Barnett** took the opportunity to find out more about it and the *Locke & Key* writer's passion for comics...

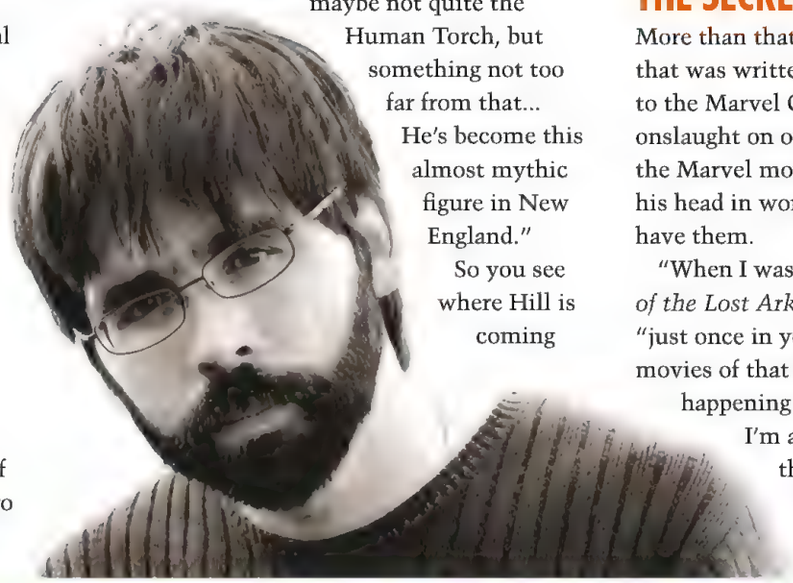
Author Joe Hill has a secret he wants to share. His new novel *The Fireman*, a post-apocalyptic epic which entered the *New York Times* bestseller list with a very hot bullet at number one, is actually about superheroes.

It might not seem like that on the face of it. *The Fireman* concerns the last days of the world as we know it thanks to a nasty little spore called Draco incendia trychophyton, known colloquially as Dragonscale. One of the more aesthetically-pleasing aspects of contracting this plague is that the carriers end up with ornate, tattoo-like markings on their body.

But that's nothing to the real damage Dragonscale does: at any moment, the infected are likely to spontaneously burst into flame, taking with them anyone in their close vicinity, not to mention vehicles, buildings, forests... Pretty soon, the population is decimated and society is breaking down as vast swathes of the civilised world are aflame.

Which doesn't on the face of it sound much like a superhero story. No-one leaps tall buildings in a single bound, nobody squeezes themselves into Lycra for fearless acts of heroism. And nobody saves the world at the last minute.

But at the novel's narrative core is the titular Fireman, British expatriate John Rookwood. "John Rookwood has learned how to hack the spore," Hill explains. "Instead of burning him up, it's granted him abilities to control the flame. He's maybe not quite the Human Torch, but something not too far from that... He's become this almost mythic figure in New England."



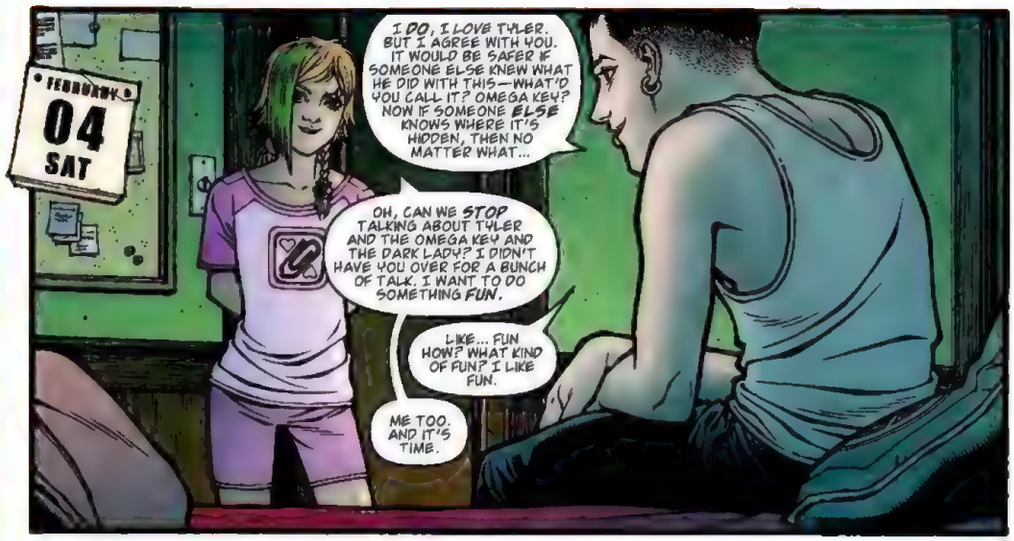
So you see where Hill is coming from when he calls this a superhero story. And when he cites the X-Men as a great influence on him as a 13-year-old, it all makes even more sense. This is a zombie novel from the point of view of the infected, the narrative of those who have been, yes, mutated by the plague, who are cast out of the remnants of society, who are feared and killed. There may be no ancient godlike beings, no athletic heroes, no overt and flashy super-powers, but this is your X-Men Apocalypse right here.

THE SECRET ORIGIN

More than that, *The Fireman* is a novel that was written directly as a response to the Marvel Cinematic Universe's onslaught on our multiplexes. Hill loves the Marvel movies to bits, still shakes his head in wonder at the fact we even have them.

"When I was a kid, a film like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* happened once," he says, "just once in your lifetime. With Marvel, movies of that scope and calibre are happening twice a year, every year. I'm a huge, huge admirer of the movies and Netflix TV shows."

Here he pauses. "At the same time... the >


FEBRUARY
04
SAT
I DO, I LOVE TYLER. BUT I AGREE WITH YOU. IT WOULD BE SAFER IF SOMEONE ELSE KNEW WHAT HE DID WITH THIS—WHAT'D YOU CALL IT? OMEGA KEY? NOW IF SOMEONE ELSE KNOWS WHERE IT'S HIDDEN, THEN NO MATTER WHAT...
OH, CAN WE STOP TALKING ABOUT TYLER AND THE OMEGA KEY AND THE DARK LADY? I DIDN'T HAVE YOU OVER FOR A BUNCH OF TALK. I WANT TO DO SOMETHING FUN.
LIKE... FUN HOW? WHAT KIND OF FUN? I LIKE FUN.
ME TOO. AND IT'S TIME.

Marvel Cinematic Universe does have a few punishing flaws. And chief among them is the fact that across the entire MCU there's pretty much just one female character, Black Widow, who is pretty much forced to represent every single woman across the world. That's a big burden for one character to carry!

"*The Fireman* is a definite reaction to the lack of female representation in the Marvel Cinematic Universe," Hill declares. "I really wanted to write a big science fiction story where the female characters are central. That was the big intentional impetus for this.

"The title is deceptive," he continues. "The real hero in all this is Harper. It's her story. It's all about getting to the heart of this young woman."

It's also about exploring the cast of characters around her, who are mainly female. So is the community of infected at Wyndham Camp (the name of which, as an aside, is one of Hill's many nods to apocalyptic fiction in the book. You'll also spot a boat called the Maggie Atwood, and several other end-of-the-world Easter eggs). John Rookwood, the Fireman himself, is often absent from the narrative.

Above: Hill and artist Gabriel Rodriguez make their characters real and personable enough to care about

Below: *Locke & Key* tells a complex story of ancient evil reaching into the present day

> "THE FIREMAN IS A REACTION TO THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE"

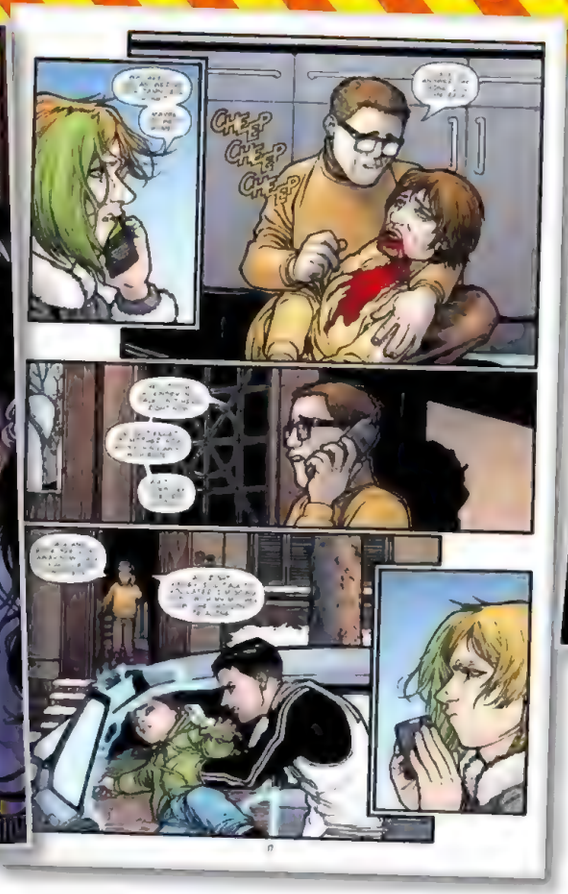
The Fireman has already been optioned as a movie, so while we're waiting for *Black Widow, Wasp* and *Captain Marvel*, maybe Joe Hill can redress the balance. Fans of his work have another reason to celebrate, too: the comic book he created with artist Gabriel Rodríguez for IDW Publishing, *Locke & Key*, is not only being teased for a return at the end of the year, but looks finally to be heading for the small screen.

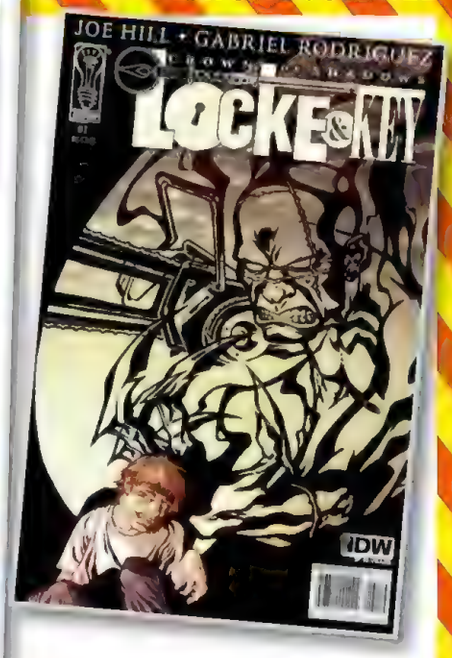
It was announced in May that IDW is developing the series with Hill as screenwriter and executive producer. The title has been a huge fan favourite and almost made it to TV five years ago when Fox optioned it, getting as far as shooting a pilot. It's the story of the Locke family and their rambling New England mansion, which holds a series of mysterious and powerful keys hidden in its creaking walls. It's set in the fictional Lovecraft, Massachusetts, which is based closely on the real town of Nahant.

COMIC BOOK GUY

Surprisingly, given his rather comfortable position at the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list with *The Fireman*, Hill turned to writing comics because he never thought he'd make it as a novelist.

"I wrote four novels I was unable to sell in my 20s and early





30s," he reveals, "and got to the point where I didn't think I had the talent to write a novel. So I started writing short stories, all about the weird and fantastic, and I started getting some attention."

Some of that attention came from a Marvel talent scout, who commissioned him to write an 11-page Spider-Man story. Hill beams: "I got a cheque with Spider-Man on it! I wish I'd kept it and framed it but... y'know. It was a cheque. I needed to cash it!"

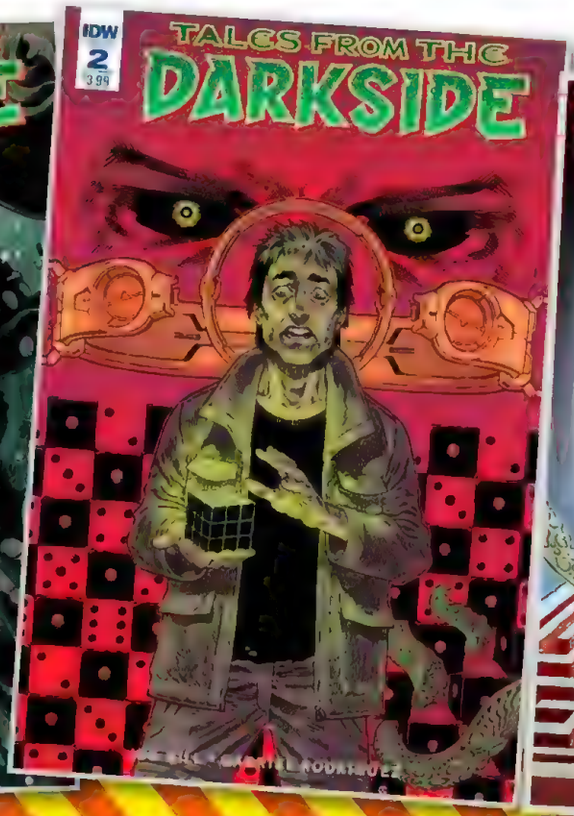
Buoyed by this success, Hill began to assemble a stack of comic book pitches. One of them was about a house filled with impossible keys, but everyone passed on it.

"It stayed in my head, though," he says. "And at that time IDW started cherry-picking science-fiction writers and adapting their stories for comics. They were talking to me about my stories and I said, hey, I've got something better. Something original. I said I could probably wrap it up in six issues." He pauses. "I guess I was only off by 31 issues."

Comics are in the blood for Hill – "I am a comic book writer by nature," he says. "I've always been into comic books. For my kids, >

Above right: The award-winning *Locke & Key* team reunite for a new four-issue horror series.

Below: A selection of suitably spooksome covers from Hill's upcoming new *Tales from the Darkside* comic for IDW.



their heroes are Iron Man, Ant-Man, Captain America. For me it was Spider-Man, so you can imagine what it was like when I got to write him."

His 11-page Spidey story wasn't the first time he'd tried his hand at writing the iconic Marvel character, either: when he was about 12 he sent in a script to a Marvel try-out initiative – and got a letter back from then editor-in-chief, the legendary Jim Shooter, saying, "This is great work, kid".

Above right: *The Cape: 1969* is a 2012 mini-series co-written by Hill with Jason Ciaramella and illustrated by Nelson Daniel

Above left: Striking cover art from issue 5 of the first story arc of *Locke & Key: Welcome to Lovecraft*

> "I'M A COMIC BOOK WRITER BY NATURE. I'VE ALWAYS BEEN INTO COMICS"

Hill continues: "When I was about 12 or 13 I fell love with the X-Men, and then the Vertigo stuff came out from DC and I was just blown away. When they started publishing Judge Dredd in America I couldn't get enough of that – I loved it!"

Given the creepiness of *Locke & Key*, it's unsurprising that Hill remembers the horror titles best from his youthful comic reading. "The first thing I remember reading as a kid," he says, "was a DC Digest called something like 'Do You Believe in Ghosts?'. I was really into Doctor Thirteen and the Phantom Stranger, and Gene Colan's *Tomb of Dracula*."

It sounds like Joe Hill didn't live in the sort of family where comic books – especially the scarier ones – were frowned upon. Which, of course, he didn't: as all of his readers are now aware, his dad is a chap called Stephen King.

"Ooh," says Hill. "That reminds me, the actual first comics I read were these beautiful hardcover editions of all the old EC horror comics that Dad had in the 1980s. I remember loving them so much. I'm not sure it was appropriate for me to be reading them, to be honest. They were violent and perverted." He breaks into a wide grin. "I loved it!"

BRINGING OUT THE BEST

The EC comics were, of course, typified by gruesome art and killer twists... so it's easy to see why Hill has come full circle with his latest comic project, a graphic revival of

the old *Tales from the Dark Side* horror anthology series, which he and *Locke & Key* partner Gabriel Rodriguez are doing for IDW.

That, too, has its roots in an almost-but-not-quite TV show that Hill was involved in. "A while back I got hired to reboot *Tales from the Dark Side* for CBS. I plotted out three seasons – these would be stories that retained that *Twilight Zone/Outer Limits* sort of feel but, although they would stand alone, all the stories would be connected. It would be like a giant puzzle, like the show *Lost*."

Although the pilot was filmed, it never aired. Hill explains: "People might not realise how hard it is getting a show on the air. It's the toughest nut to crack. But I had a conversation with CBS about getting my scripts back and then I adapted them as a comic book."

As entrenched in horror as he is, Joe Hill could be forgiven if he had a somewhat gloomy outlook. But he doesn't. In fact, for one so steeped in the apocalypse he's incredibly upbeat.

"I think *The Fireman* is almost an anti-apocalypse novel," he declares. "I read *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy and there's all this horror in it about what people do to each other. Some books just rub the reader's face in hopelessness. But I think the best of human nature comes out when everything gets really bad.

"Humans are basically an affectionate species. Our sense of fairness is integral to our survival. I don't think anything could wipe that out, not even the end of the world. Even when the Titanic was sinking, some people gave up their seats on the lifeboats for others.

Above: Hill admits that his early exposure to the notorious EC horror comics affected him. So Dr Wertham was right

Below: The first series of *The Cape* was based on a short story by Hill about finding you actually have the power you've always wished for – and then using it to wreak vengeance on the world you think has wronged you

> "I COULD NOT GET ENOUGH OF JUDGE DREDD. I LOVED IT!"

"Where we stand now in the early 21st century, it appears we have a lot of turbulence ahead. There's global warming, the refugee crisis, the idea that we'll be fighting over oil... But even in the face of all this we're pretty adaptable. That's what I wanted to write about with *The Fireman*.

"I think at times of worst stress is when we are at our best," Hill says. "Things look pretty dire for human beings at the moment... but then, don't they always?" CH

The art of RACHAEL STOTT

THE BREAKOUT YOUNG ARTIST OF TREK/APES AND DOCTOR WHO TALKS TO **STEPHEN KELLY**

Earlier this year, comic book artist Rachael Stott got a piece of fan mail through the post. It was a drawing of Doctor Who walking among the stars, with a touching message telling her "what an incredible artist you are."

"I opened it up," she tells us, "and my housemate was like, 'Are you... alright?' I just turned and screamed, 'I think I've just got something from Peter Capaldi!'"

And for good reason. Despite only two years in the industry, Stott has made a formidable name for herself as an artist on Titan's *Doctor Who* range, especially when it comes to Capaldi's Twelfth Doctor. She got her big break at London's Super Comic Con in 2014, where a chance encounter with Chris Ryall of IDW Publishing – who happened to spot her portfolio – led to her being commissioned for crossover mini-series *Star Trek / Planet of the Apes: The Primate Directive*. "It was the most insane example of being in the right place at the right time I've ever had," she says.

Having just put the finishing touches to her issue of IDW's *Ghostbusters International* (which follows the original '80s characters) she sat down with *Comic Heroes* to talk *Doctor Who*, diversity, and her second biggest-fan: *Ghostbusters* reboot director Paul Feig.

COMIC HEROES: You've now drawn every Doctor from Paul McGann onwards. How have you found capturing them on page?
RACHAEL STOTT: I found Paul McGann the hardest one to nail, because I haven't seen him moving around since the TV movie, so I wasn't used to the way his face works. I was sticking so slavishly to one photo thinking, "No, his nose is more like this..."

I always think the basic thing to grasp is that for each face, people have certain tells. So if you nail this, this and this – even if the chin looks wrong or the ears look wrong – it'll still look like Matt Smith. For example, Smith has really delicate eyebrows and a distinctive nose. With Peter Capaldi, it's got to the point now where I was doing sketches for kids – "bom bom bom, done!" He's so second-nature to me now. I even put a piece of *Rick and Morty* fan-art online recently and people were like, "Wait, Rick looks like the Doctor!" And he did. I can't stop drawing him in that style now; his nose is a very distinct shape, and his eyebrows are a certain type of triangle...

Opposite: Rachael is famed for her ability to depict the Twelfth Doctor. In fact, she says, lots of her drawings are now starting to look like Peter Capaldi...

CH: I'd have thought Capaldi would be the hardest to nail, as there's so much character in his face...
RS: Yeah, but you've got more to work with. The hard ones are the ones like William Shatner as Kirk – he's the hardest. I imagine now he's easier with some age on his face, but during the original series he looks like an Action Man figure, whereas Capaldi has big eyes and really strong eyebrows. If you just draw, like, a really big angry-eyebrowed face, it kind of just ends up looking like him. But under that cartoony surface he has so much vulnerability too; he's got that thing where he'll be like "Bah bah bah bah!" and then "Oh my god I'm so sad!" Trying to capture that is fun.

CH: It's been two years since you were first published in IDW's *Star Trek / Planet of the Apes* crossover. How has your art progressed from, that first cover to *Doctor Who*? >

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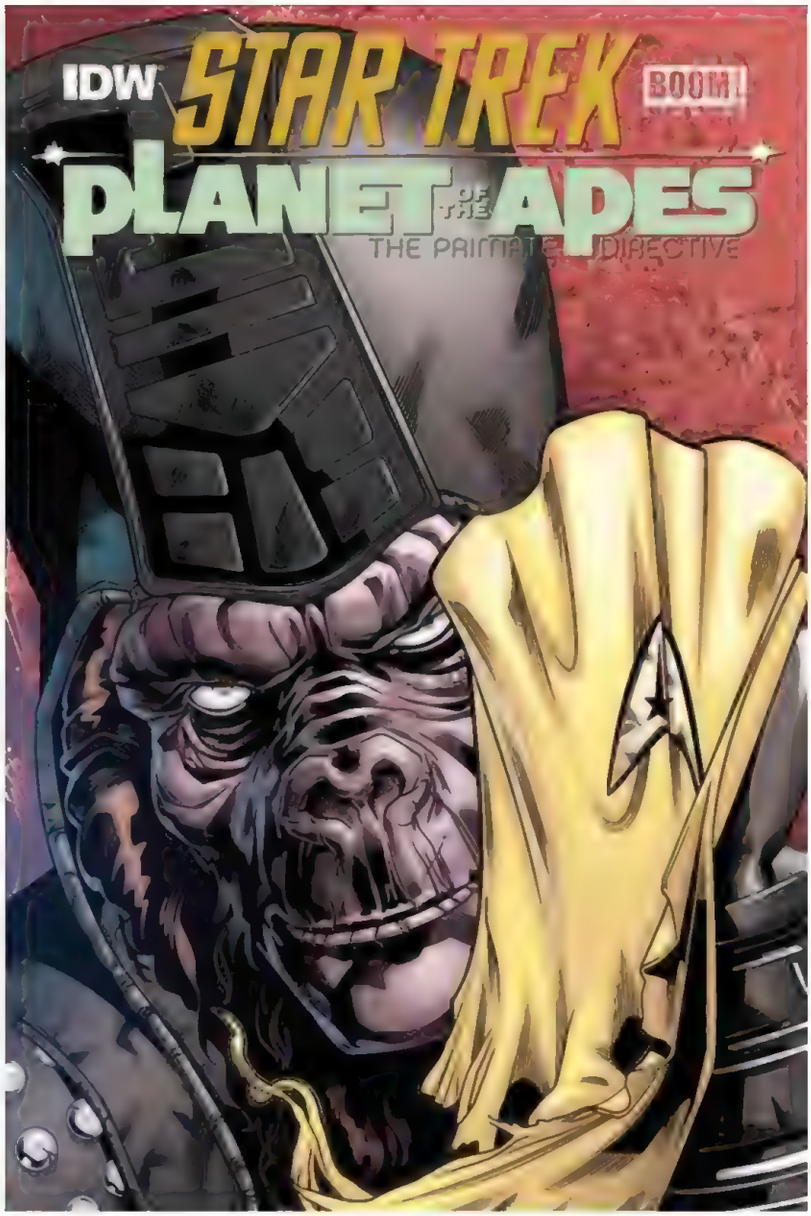


IMAGE IDW PUBLISHING/BOOM! STUDIOS. ® & © CBS STUDIOS INC. STAR TREK © PARAMOUNT PICTURES CORPORATION. PLANET OF THE APES TM & © TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX FILM CORPORATION

Left: Rachael admits to having been a *Trek* fan before doing the *Trek/Apes* crossover, but although the original *Apes* was one of her favourite films, she says she wasn't as well versed in its lore. .

Above: Rachael enjoys handling the Doctor in different costumes and varying situations.

Opposite: As artist on Titan's Twelfth Doctor Year Two, Rachael gets to draw her favourite Doctor.. with a guitar

RS: That cover doesn't hold up too badly, actually. That's one of those pieces that I can live with and I'm not like "oh my god". I'm so incredibly proud of *Star Trek / Planet of the Apes*. It was my first gig. But there's stuff I'd go back and redraw. There always is. The fan-made Doctor Who comic that got me hired for that job is awful. I'm not proud of that at all. It's really badly drawn. All the faces look weirdly flat. If they turn then they just have 2D Mickey Mouse faces. But I always think of this quote from John Romita Jr, where he says: "You do anything for eight hours a day, seven days a week, for 30 years, you're gonna get good at it." And I went from doing comics in my spare time, after work, on weekends, to all of a sudden doing it all day every day. The quality goes vroom!

CH: Visualising something as surreal and imaginative as *Doctor Who* must be interesting?

RS: I think comics can bring something so unique to that franchise. In the most recent issue, Robbie Morrison, my writer, did the most amazing issue where the Doctor gets pulled into a comic book and he's exploding out the panels, and I felt like Robbie had seen what I'd been saying. I'm really, really eager to explore the possibilities of that.

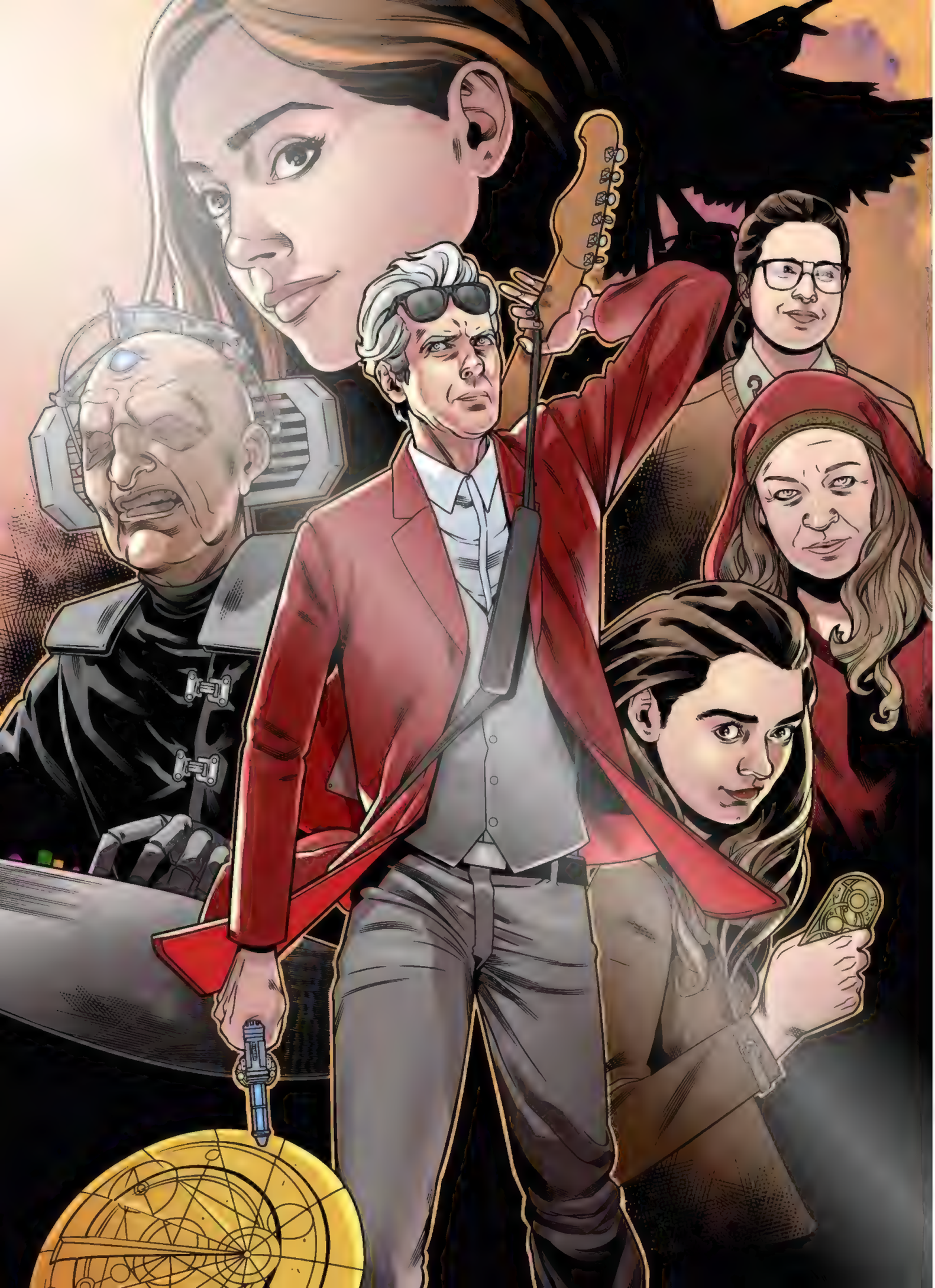
> "I'M VERY PROUD OF STAR TREK/APES, BUT THERE'S STUFF I'D GO BACK AND REDRAW"

CH: Are there certain things you're not allowed to do with *Doctor Who*? Rules, etc?

RS: No. When I worked on *Star Trek* they were very... I'm a big fan of doing OTT expressions – which is probably why I got hired on *Doctor Who*! – and there's a few panels where Kirk is like "Oh. My. God!" and they sent back: "Change it. You can't draw Kirk like that." So yeah, with *Star Trek* there was way more notes. I wouldn't say that's a negative thing either. It was kinda fun because it was practising really heavy note-taking. And on *Ghostbusters*, they don't own the rights to the actors' faces, so I was drawing Egon, sending it off to Eric the writer, and asking, "Is this too close? Does it look too much like him?" It's got to kind-of look like him. That was hard as I'm so used to doing likenesses, but it turned out to be pretty cool.

CH: Speaking of likenesses, what about your strange premonition of new *Doctor Who* companion Bill with Natalie in issue 2.5?

RS: It was so funny because when >



they announced Pearl Mackie, I immediately sent an email saying, "Why didn't you tell me to change it?!" But they didn't know it was going to be her either, and I was like "Oh god, are we going to have to redraw it?" But to be honest, things could have been funny where they can go, "Oh yeah, she looks too similar to the new companion..." But god bless my editor, who is amazing, who replied, like, "Well, luckily there's more than one black girl in London." I was talking to one of my friends, saying if the new companion had been a white brunette girl, no one would've blinked at it. So it actually turned out to be pretty cool that in one year we got two black girls, with very good fashion sense...

CH: It's always struck me that Titan's Doctor Who comics are way more diverse than the TV show...
RS: I'm always singing Titan's praises as there's a big thing about diversity in the industry at the moment, and Titan has a 50/50 mix of men and women; they're showing people it can be done. I don't think that's why the characters are diverse, though; I think it's just because we have really good writers. But the *Doctor Who* books are doing really well. The Eleventh Doctor had a black companion, which was great, and the Tenth Doctor has a Latino companion and a Chinese lady. It's pretty cool. I remember when I got a script and it just said "A nerdy girl in her bedroom", and I remember I read an article that day about diversity being important but we need to break out of stereotypes, so I thought "Let's make her a black nerdy girl" – I gave her one of Storm's earrings too.

CH: So let's talk about your fan-art for the new Ghostbusters film. What inspired you to draw that?
RS: I did it right after they brought out the initial photo of the cast in their costumes and it hit me like a ton of bricks; like "oh my god, I wish I had seen that when I was a ten-year-old." The only women *Ghostbusters* you saw then were Halloween costumes that were hot pants and a bra. And they didn't really look like they were ready to bust any ghosts. [*Ghostbusters* director] Paul Feig actually DM'd me on Twitter and was like "I really like your art work, can I have a print of it?" so I said "Yeah, sure, I'll just send you the hi-res file and you print it off." And then he FedEx'd it to me in a big tube and got me to sign it and stuff. So weird and awesome. I think it's hanging up in his office.

Above: Fan-art pic of the new *Ghostbusters*

Opposite: Rachael did this poster of fan-favourite Missy as a print for this year's Armageddon Expo in Wellington, New Zealand.

CH: What are your thoughts on the sexist backlash to it?
RS: It's just trolls. It's just internet people. I figure most of the time it's either ten-year-old boys or 40-year-old boys. I did a tweet yesterday that said "that *Ghostbusters* film looks so silly and harmless – we >

GHOSTBUSTERS © SONY PICTURES

Above: Rachael displays her talent for capturing actor likenesses.

Left: Captain Jack Harkness in a kinetic action page from Titan's Ninth Doctor series.

Opposite: "Probably my favourite thing I've drawn and coloured ever, so far? It just turned out really nice. My second favourite problematic dimension-hopping grandpa!" A fantastic image of Rick and Morty.

must take a stand against it for some reason" and all these guys were messaging me saying "We're taking it down because it looks terrible", and I was like, "That's silly, though!" It's okay to think a film looks terrible but you usually just watch a trailer in the cinema and go "I probably won't pay to see that" and then go home and like, kiss your wife.

CH: Wife?!
RS: Your inflatable wife off of eBay.

CH: When it comes to sexism in comics, former *Rat Queens* artist Tess Fowler once told me that although she speaks out, she's always afraid it'll hurt her career. As someone relatively new to comics, do you feel the same way?
RS: People like Tess are good – she shows you that you can have a career while speaking out. And Kelly Sue DeConnick and Gail Simone, who are completely fearless about telling the truth. So when they say something, you can trust it, which is incredibly important. Especially as a newbie in the industry, where there's so much hearsay, like "Did you hear about that guy that did that thing? We can't say his name..."

> "IT'S AN INDUSTRY INCREDIBLY BASED ON WHO YOU KNOW"

It's an industry incredibly based on who you know, and it's that weird thing like if someone comes out going, "Hey pussycat, nice tits!", you can be like, "That guy's an asshole", but if it's something much more insidious... Here's an example that's not real: an editor coming up to you at a convention going, "I really like your work, do you want to get a drink and talk about it?' and you're just like "Er..." You don't want to ask your friends if he's being creepy, and then they'll go, "Oh he runs so and so comics, you can't say that." It's like navigating a swimming pool full of sharks sometimes. CH

REBORN AGAIN

REBIRTH RETURNS THE LEGACY TO DC'S SUPERHERO LINE AND LOOKS FORWARD TO A BRIGHT FUTURE. **STEPHEN JEWELL** TALKS TO SOME OF THE KEY CREATORS...

Designed to hark back to the company's colourful past while telling new stories, DC Rebirth is the company's latest revamp.

The controversial New 52 relaunch in 2011 wiped out decades of continuity and reset most titles to issue one in the name of freeing up creators and making the comics more accessible. Critics, however, suggested that DC had thrown the super-baby out with the bathwater. Something had to change.

This time, however, it feels different. DC are once again acknowledging their history with long-standing titles like *Action Comics* and *Detective Comics* reverting to their original numbering, with #957 and #934 respectively. Meanwhile other popular characters like Green Lantern and Wonder Woman have received their own Rebirth issues, which will continue on as twice-monthly books. The early buzz has been extremely positive (and you can read our review of the opening roster on page 122). But what's still in store? We contacted the creators behind some of the upcoming books to find out more...

RESTORING HERITAGE

"DC Comics is the oldest of all the comic book companies," says Gene Luen Yang, writer of *New Super-Man*. "It's long, rich legacy is one of its core strengths, so Rebirth is all >

NEW SUPER-MAN: GENE LUEN YANG

Have you put a lot of yourself into Kenan Kong?
Each of my characters reflects some part of me. Kenan's a bit of a jerk, and while I wasn't nearly as brash and outspoken as he is, I've definitely had my jerk-ish moments.

Does New Super-Man represent the best that we can be, like the original Kal-El Supes?
Throughout the decades, one of the core themes of Superman is bullying. If you read Superman comics from the very beginning, from the '30s to the '40s, you'll see that he started off as a bully. As the years went on, he slowly evolved into the role model he know today, and Kenan is going to go through a similar evolution.

How does Kenan come to gain his super powers?
Kenan comes into contact with a secret organization, almost like a Chinese A.R.G.U.S. and they have a hand in his transformation.

What villains can we expect to see?
In the DC Universe, China's rapid economic growth has led to an equally rapid rise in American style super-villainy. For more, you'll have to read the book!

> "WE'RE USING EACH REBIRTH ISSUE AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO START AGAIN"

[redacted] they're telling modern stories that embrace that legacy."

According to Robert Venditti, who is teaming up with artists Fabian Nicieza and Pete Woods on *Hal Jordan and the Green Lantern Corps #1*, Rebirth very much represents a new beginning. "When I flew out to Burbank and met with DC editorial about Rebirth, they described it as being 'fresh starts.' Rebirth came to us as an opportunity to close the loop on the New 52, and then start again with new stories that remind the characters in who they've historically been," he says, continuing that the Silver Age storylines will be getting back to what he does best.

"We all know that Jordan is getting his ring back, as we're in contact to the promotional material, and he appears to confront Hank in *Green Lantern #1*," he adds, referring to the companion title by Sam Humphries and Robson Rocha. "But the story of where his ring comes from and how he got it is something that will have a huge impact on the Green Lantern mythology moving forward."

An early twist in launch issue, *DC Rebirth #1*, is the return of Wally West – the original Kid Flash, absent throughout the New 52

Above: The Birds of Prey roar into action in this dynamic cover.

Having been completely forgotten by fellow Flash Barry Allen, not to mention the likes of his good friend Dick 'Nightwing' Grayson and former girlfriend Linda Park, Wally's return will prove pivotal to DC's new status quo, and he has so far also appeared in *Flash Rebirth* and *Titans Rebirth*. "Rebirth is all about a desire to get to the core of these characters and concepts and exploring why we fell in love with them in the first place," says Rob Williams, who is scripting August's new *Suicide Squad* title. "It really means that all of DC history is open to us, and Geoff really set out that statement with Wally's return in the Rebirth special. But, more than that, it was what that moment said with Barry hugging Wally, as there was a lot of heart there. Rebirth is about getting to the heart of DC."

BATGIRL: HOPE LARSON

Is Rebirth a completely fresh start for Batgirl?
Batgirl is a direct continuation of the previous arcs written by Brendan Fletcher and Cameron Stewart, and drawn by Babs Tarr. That said, it is an easy jumping-on point because it's a self-contained story outside of Batgirl's usual stomping grounds.

Is Barbara Gordon the best Batgirl – she is the original incarnation after all?
I love Barbara because I find her relatable, or at least as relatable as a beautiful genius superhero can be! She's young, her life is continually in the process of coming together and falling apart again, and she's a little bit goofy and awkward in her non-Batgirl life. She's a lot of fun to write.

The first storyline sees Barbara traveling to Asia. Is it fun taking Batgirl out of her natural environment?
The story starts out in Japan, but she'll also be passing through Singapore, South Korea and China. Basically, I've sent her to places I wish I could visit, too! It's been a tough book to write because of how much research goes into scouting locations and learning about local culture.

You're working with *American Vampire* artist Rafael Albuquerque...
Rafael is brilliant. He's drawn some incredible layouts and made some tricky ideas work beautifully on the page. Plus, he's so nice and so fast. I think people will be blown away by his work on this book.

NEW CREATORS

"To me personally, DC Rebirth is a new phase in my comics career," says *Batgirl* writer Hope Larson. "I'm getting to play with a whole new box of toys and interact with a different audience than the one that I'm usually writing for, which also skews much younger, which is really exciting!"

Best known for her graphic novel *A Wrinkle In Time*, Larson was asked to pitch for *Batgirl* by Batman group editor Mark Doyle after penning a short story for the four-issue *Gotham Academy* yearbook storyline earlier this year. "Mark already had a great idea for the arc, which was about Batgirl going on a backpacking trip to Japan," says Larson. "Travel stories are right up my alley, so I jumped at the chance. On my way to that pitch meeting, I accidentally locked >

BATGIRL AND THE BIRDS OF PREY: JULIE AND SHAWNA BENSON

As the book is called *Batgirl and the Birds of Prey*, does Barbara Gordon take a lead role?

In the first arc, Batgirl definitely has taken it upon herself to take the reins of the Birds of Prey. Someone is profiting off of her old moniker, Oracle, which is like a personal attack to Barbara. So, it falls on her to not only take down this "faux-racle" but recruit a group to help her do so. She starts by seeking out her good friend and former Birds of Prey colleague Dinah Lance.

So who are the other Birds of Prey?

The fun part of the Birds is how much they differ in opinion even though they are all part of a team. Barbara is a by the book vigilante, unwilling to kill and more willing to help the GCPD do their jobs as protectors of Gotham. Black Canary finds herself stuck between Batgirl's way of thinking and Huntress's style, which leans more towards "slash and burn". At the heart, these women all have something in common – their desire for good to win over evil and a more familial thematic bond that we explore in great detail in the first act.

How does Barbara learn that there's apparently another Oracle in town?

She discovers there's someone out there selling information to the highest bidder in the mob community of Gotham, and worse, they're doing it under the name of Oracle. Given Barbara's past using that name, she's understandably upset and wants to get to the bottom of it. Needless to say, she'll encounter some challenges in doing that along with some surprising new villains.

my cat keep in the house and had to think it through a million times and feels. That seemed like a very Barbara Gordon thing to do, and I felt a little bit on the job, and I did."

"In TV, we only get to a writer's room as part of a team man, throwing ideas about until the best idea wins," says Shawna Benson, screenwriter and one half of the power writing duo (with Julie Benson) behind *Batgirl and the Birds of Prey* down by Claire Roe. "Unlike film, TV is very much a writer's medium, but it's the showrunner who has the final say in what makes it to screen. Our experience thus far with DC has been very similar to the amount of creative freedom that has been given to us as writers, but is expanded exponentially with the ability to create without the boundaries of budget and effects holding us back."

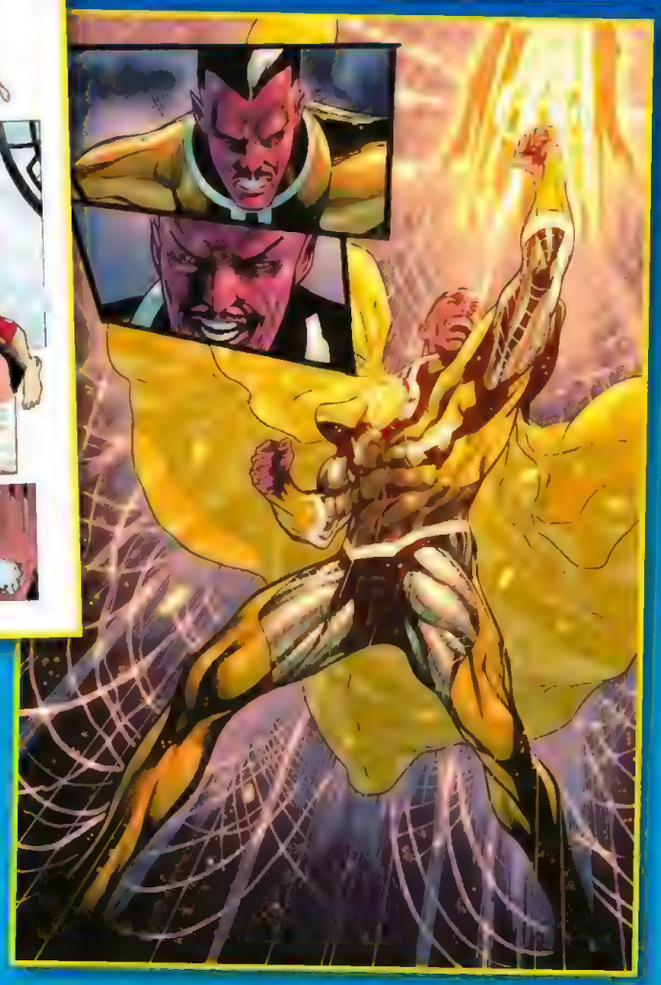
"We've found our process in writing TV works just as well with comics," adds Julie. "We break down everything together in

NEW CHARACTERS TOO

Conceived by Gerard Jones and Jim Lee, *New Asian Man* is "set amongst a culture the Superman mythos neither an Asian comics" says writer Gene Luen Yang. It revolves around Kenan Kong, who significantly shares more than a similar sounding alternative name with Clark Kent. He's also gained some of his powers

"When DC first approached

> "WHEN DC FIRST APPROACHED ME WITH NEW SUPER-MAN, I TURNED IT DOWN"



Above and left: Some

HAL JORDAN AND THE GREEN LANTERN CORP: ROBERT VENDITTI

Is Rebirth a completely fresh jumping-on point or does it refer back to previous Green Lantern stories?
It's both. We aren't starting out with origin stories for our cast, but that isn't the mission statement of Rebirth. Rebirth is about making everything accessible for a new reader, but also honouring everything that has come before in the long and storied histories of these characters.

John Stewart and Guy Gardner are also part of your cast. Are they very different characters to Hal?
John is the most natural leader, as he's intelligent, thoughtful, and measured. He thinks every situation through and comes up with the best solution, so the Corps is lucky to have him holding the reins. Guy is the Green Lantern with the biggest chip on his shoulder. He's intensely loyal, but he also always thinks he has something to prove. It's kind of sad in a way because he's had a long and distinguished career, but it still isn't satisfying to him.

Are you liaising closely with Sam Humphries, who is writing *Green Lanterns*?
Hal Jordan and the Green Lantern Corps will focus on most of the historical cast of the Green Lantern mythology: Hal, John, Guy, and all the crazy, fun aliens who make up the Corps. The stories will be based primarily in space. *Greens Lanterns* will focus mainly on Simon Baz and Jessica Cruz, and will spend more time on Earth. Sam and I are in communication both directly and through our editors, so we're each aware of what the other is doing.

After going over towards the light side recently, Sinestro is back to his old villainous ways...
Sinestro is one of the most compelling villains in all of comics. He's very much an ends-justify-the-means kind of guy, and for him the end is complete order across the universe. But as with every great villain, Sinestro is the hero of his own story. He has a code and set of ethics that he adheres to. And he's a father. All those aspects of his character will come into play.

me with *New Super-Man*, I turned it down because I felt like there were too many cultural and political landmines involved," says Yang, who previously won acclaim for his 2006 graphic novel *American Born Chinese*. Instead, collaborating with John Romita Jr on the regular superhero book last year. "For *Chinese Amerikan*, as we start [in mainland China] when she was an infant while we did not leave and raised in Taiwan. My family's at least a couple of generations removed from the actual experience of living in China, so I would be writing from an outsider's perspective. Yet because of my last name, many readers would assume that I was an insider."

But rather than adhering to the old adage about writing about what you know, Yang resolved to write about what he wants to know. "I want to know more about today's China," he says. "It's such an interesting, important place, and our global future will be defined by China's relationship with the West."

Drawn by Viktor Bogdanovic, Kenan Kong is one of the few new characters introduced during DC Rebirth, meaning that Yang has perhaps been afforded more creative freedom than if he were to reinvent a long-standing character. "I do feel like Viktor and I have gotten a good amount of artistic elbow room," says Yang, who believes that *New Super-Man* is nevertheless in keeping with the essential spirit of DC Rebirth.

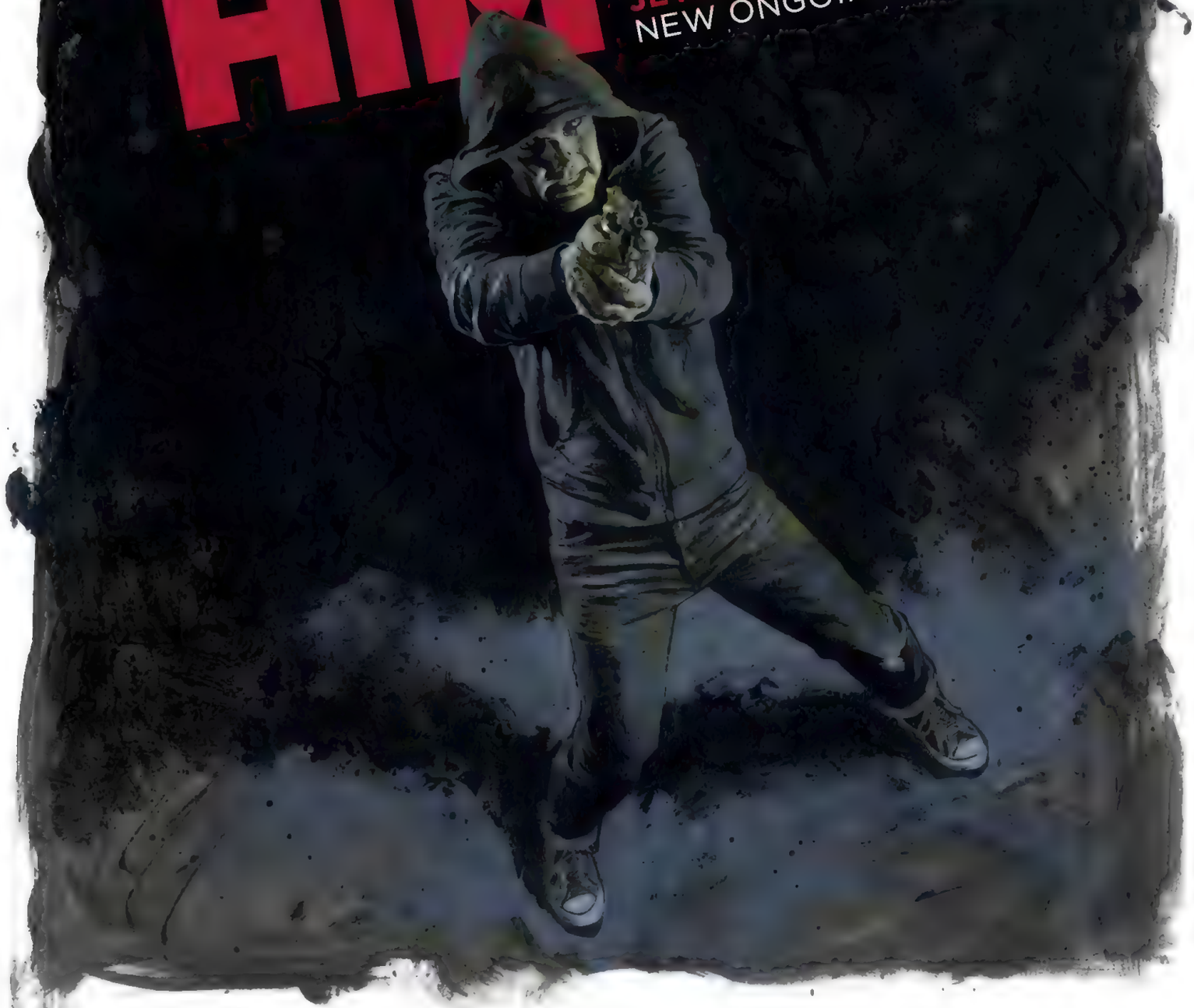
"Viktor and I are trying to craft a book that fits in well with Rebirth, and one that feels fresh yet still pays homage to DC's legacy," he reasons. "We want it to be familiar and unfamiliar all at once. We've gotten to create the main characters and much of his supporting cast from scratch. Yet we still want *New Super-Man* to be rooted in the mythos of DC Comics. This is the same universe you know and love, but seen through a brand-new lens."

Familiar and unfamiliar all at once? That seems to sum up the DC Rebirth project as a whole.

***Hal Jordan and the Green Lantern Corp*, *Batgirl*, *Batgirl and the Birds of Prey* and *New Super-Man* are published by DC Comics in July. *Suicide Squad* is published in August.**

DEATH BECOMES HIM

AWARD-WINNING TEAM ED BRUBAKER AND SEAN PHILLIPS SHOW **STEPHEN JEWELL** AROUND THEIR NEW ONGOING SERIES



WAIT – WAIT – !
This isn't how I imagined my life would be. Ever.
But you don't always have a choice, do you?
And let's face it... I've become pretty good at this.
WHO THE FU--
Killing people
People who deserve it

And yeah, you can sit there and ask what gives me the right to make that judgment
But that's just your defense.
Your alibi for not doing anything.
Because the world is shit right now, and we all know it.
Just look at the news for five fucking minutes and it's obvious.
Big business controls your government.
Assholes go on shooting rampages almost daily.

ALL IMAGES © ED BRUBAKER & SEAN PHILLIPS

This page: Both a thriller and at the same time a searching exploration of vigilantism, *Kill Or Be Killed* follows a troubled young man who finds he must kill one bad person every month.

After he quit Marvel Comics in 2013 to pursue his own creator-owned work, you wouldn't have thought there'd be much that Ed Brubaker missed about the continuous grind of monthly comics. But then he and British artist Sean Phillips embarked on gruelling runs on *Fatale* and *The Fade Out* at Image Comics, and now the long-time artistic partners-in-crime are teaming up once again next month to launch their first ongoing series, *Kill Or Be Killed*.

"With *Kill Or Be Killed*, it's partly because it's an idea that leaves room to explore a lot of different things, and partly because I missed the kind of 'what happens next?' aspect of working on books like *Daredevil* and *Captain America*," explains Brubaker, pointing out that *Fatale* more or less became an ongoing title before eventually coming to a conclusion with #24 in late 2012.

"I didn't want to do a superhero comic," he adds, so he settled on the idea of making his protagonist, Dylan, someone who only rather improbably ends up taking the law into his own hands. "I thought it might be cool to really spend some time with someone who is basically a vigilante and to explore the ramifications of that as his actions ripple outward," he says. "I thought that might give me, Sean and now Bettie [colourist Elizabeth Breitweiser] a chance to do something that was different for us. I mean, it still clearly feels like us, but it's a different point of view."

Brubaker has been quoted as saying that the series "is a bit like *Death Wish* and early '70s Spider-Man comics," but he insists that Dylan has barely anything in >

"I MISSED THE 'WHAT HAPPENS NEXT' ASPECT OF SERIES"

Terrorists blow up airports and train stations..
Cops kill innocent black kids and get away with it...
SHIT --
Psychopaths run for President.
Oh, and the Middle East is one nuke away from turning us all into dust..
And that's just the tip of the iceberg.
...NNHHH... NN...
Let's not even get into all the racism and sexism and homophobia...
And every other hateful thing that makes humanity such a nightmare to be a part of.
!!!

The fact is, there's no justice
Bad people get away with everything
MOTHER --
And greed is destroying the entire fucking planet
-- FUCKER!
We all know this is true
UGF -- !
But we refuse to really let ourselves believe it
We cling to fantasy... To hope.
SHH --

Above: The writer says the series will be very much in the Brubaker-Phillips style, but with a different point of view

common with a vengeful, mass-murdering one-man army like Frank Castle. "It's really nothing like *Death Wish* or *The Punisher*," he says. "It's not a revenge killer type of story, it's more of an exploration of a troubled guy who crosses the line because he has to."

The luckless, downtrodden Dylan is, if anything, closer in spirit to Peter Parker than the Punisher. "It's a vigilante story about a grad student in New York City," says Brubaker, admitting he cannot precisely confirm where his initial inspiration came from.

"I was riding on my bike one day and it just stuck me – this idea of someone who is compelled to find people who deserve death and kill them," he recalls. "Dylan is a reluctant killer, whom we can follow into this darkness. He does what he does not because his parents or his family got killed, or anything like that, so it's not really all that hard to stay away from those stereotypes. In some ways, it's more like *Breaking Bad*, where you get to watch the progress of this nice guy science teacher as he becomes a monster."

> **"I HAD THE TITLE WITHIN SECONDS OF THE BASIC IDEA"**

The first issue begins with a five-page sequence of Dylan going on a bloody rampage. He also sets out at length where he believes society has gone awry, including a reference to "psychopaths running for President," although Brubaker stresses that he doesn't mention any particular candidates by name. "His opening rant kind of tells you a lot about who he is. He's a guy who is in his late 20s, at the tail end of youth, and he's angry about the world and what's wrong with it, in his opinion."

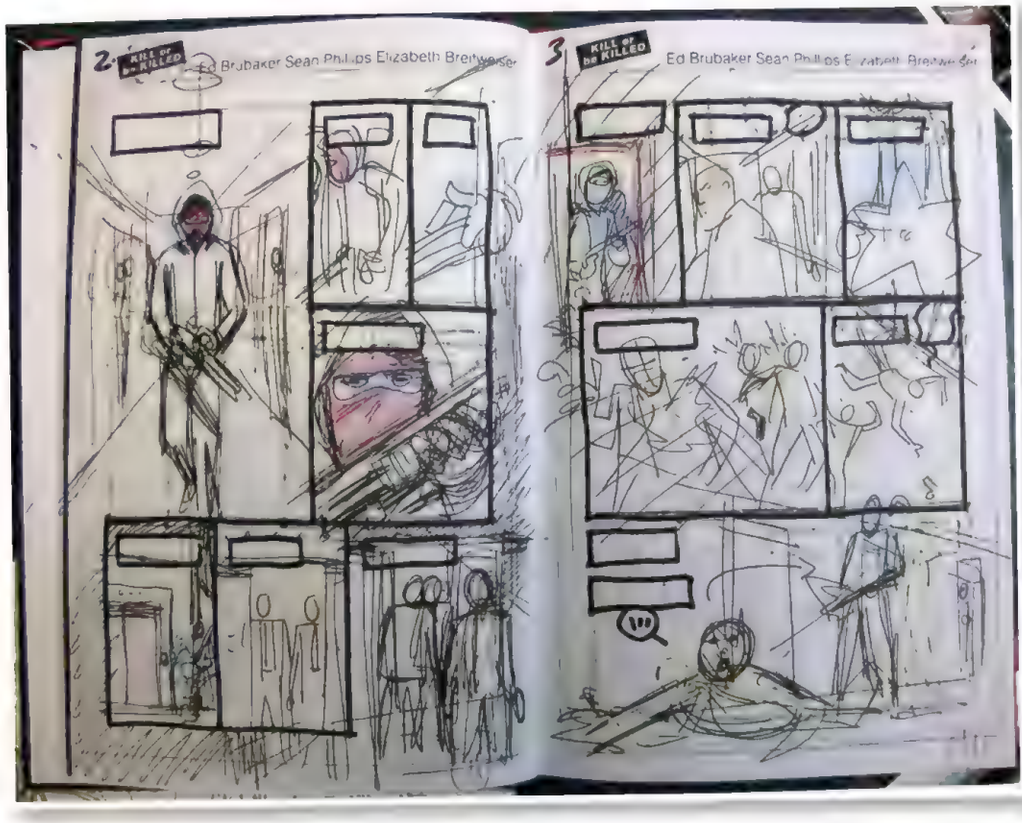
UNRELIABLE NARRATOR

"Don't forget that he's narrating his own story, and that rant is in part a justification for being a murderer," Brubaker adds. "There's some dark humour at play in this book, which is more evident in the rest of the first issue.

"IT'S AN EXPLORATION OF A TROUBLED GUY WHO CROSSES THE LINE BECAUSE HE HAS TO"

Above: What will his actions – and trying to keep them secret – do to Dylan and his life?

Below: Phillips's roughs for two of the pages opposite and on the previous page.



"I had the title – which was just a perfect title – within seconds of having the basic idea, before I had even figured out the specifics of the story," Brubaker reveals, but he is reluctant to share too many details about the motivations behind Dylan's deadly mission. However, some aspects of his situation are partly autobiographical.

"He's very different to me but some things in his life are drawn from my own days of being young and wild and broke all the time," recalls Brubaker. "He's a troubled grad student, who at 28 is a bit too old to still be in school and is struggling with life in general. Then suddenly this thing happens and he's forced to become something else. He's a very funny, cynical character, and a lot of the >

We say shit like "The arc of time is long, but it bends towards justice" when it so clearly does not.
It bends towards fascism and mass graves
YOU MOTHERFUCKER! MOTHER! FUCKER!
But we sit at our screens and fill our heads with noise and scream at each other
As if that's going to change anything
Fuck ...
I used to be like that too
But now my life is different. Obviously

book is about how he hides his new secret life as a killer from his family and friends and the girl he's in love with."

Brubaker and Phillips first worked together on 1999 Vertigo mini-series *Scene Of The Crime*, then moved on to DC/ Wildstorm series *Sleeper* in 2003. The first issue of *Criminal* – their creator-owned book for Marvel's boutique Icon imprint – appeared in 2006. The pair followed that with offbeat superhero series *Incognito* in 2009, then moved to Image in early 2012, first releasing *Fatale* and then *The Fade Out*.

Given their successful history, Brubaker simply trusts Phillips to do what he does best. When it came to Dylan's distinctive look, Phillips says, the writer sent him "a few photos of what he didn't want" – a picture of a certain actor – along with "an idea for his hairstyle.

"He also asked for him to be skinnier than I'd usually draw," says Phillips. "The rest of the characters he's mostly left up to me. Their look comes out of their

Above: With rather dark humour, the opening sequence juxtaposes graphic violence with Dylan's indignation at all the violence and injustice in the world

MAJOR CRIMINALS

Like the first one-off *Criminal* special in 2015, April's *Criminal Tenth Anniversary Edition* was released in regular comic book format but was best appreciated in the larger magazine-sized version that emulated '70s pulp publications like *Savage Sword Of Conan* and, specifically, *Deadly Hands Of Kung Fu*. Centring on former soldier-turned-hitman Tracy Lawless, the story saw his young son Teeg stumble across a rare comic book starring "Fang, The Kung Fu Werewolf," whose larger-than-life adventures were chronicled in mock extracts from the comic itself.

"I loved coming back for both of those oversized one-shots, although we're probably done with that format now," says Brubaker. "But we will return to *Criminal*, though, as I have a bunch of ideas for longer stories I want to do in that world. The response to the one-shots has been really amazing, especially from the people who scored the oversized editions. Unfortunately, most retailers won't carry that format, so it can be frustrating. But I'm selling a lot of them at conventions, and people have been just blown away by them."

situations and ages and stuff. But I never know what they're going to look like until I've pencilled the pages, and I then figure it out in the inks. Also the world around them is modern New York, so that meant plenty of research for me, although Ed will supply a photo when he wants somewhere specific."

According to Phillips, *Kill Or Be Killed* will see a slight change to his usual layouts. "We're keeping the three-tier grid that all of our books have had, but I'm adding full bleed to all of the pages to add a sense of chaos and claustrophobia, so it's going to be a dense read."

FAMILIAR TERRITORY

After colouring not only *Fatale* and *The Fade-Out* but also Brubaker and Phillips's two *Criminal* one-shot specials, Elizabeth Breitweiser is once again participating in that vital role on *Kill Or Be Killed*. "She brings everything to the book," says Phillips. "We're so lucky that she wants to work for us, as every page she colours surprises me with her colour choices, textures and storytelling. That's what I want from a colourist, someone who is an indispensable creative part of the team and cares as much about the books as Ed and I do."

Brubaker believes that *Kill Or Be Killed* is a natural successor to not only *Criminal* but also *Fatale* and *The Fade-Out*, exploring similar thematic territory. "All of our books have the same sort of aesthetic – Sean and I are known for what we're known for, after all," he remarks. "But I do try with each new project to bring something different, like perhaps a different voice or a new angle into a certain type of story. With *Kill Or Be Killed*, we've both brought a bit of both, as it feels like a crime comic but it also feels like something else, and the narration is a very different voice from any of the *Criminal* narrators so far."

If *Kill Or Be Killed* is ongoing, does Brubaker have a plan for where the series will be heading? "I've got it mapped out pretty far," he says. "In the first few issues, you'll meet our killer and learn of his dilemma, as we track his progress, as he learns to kill bad people and get away with it. But this is not some ex-soldier or hardened criminal – Dylan is a grad student studying literature, so how does he go about getting weapons, and how the hell does he find someone who deserves death? And what will this do to his life?"

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BY THE BOOK

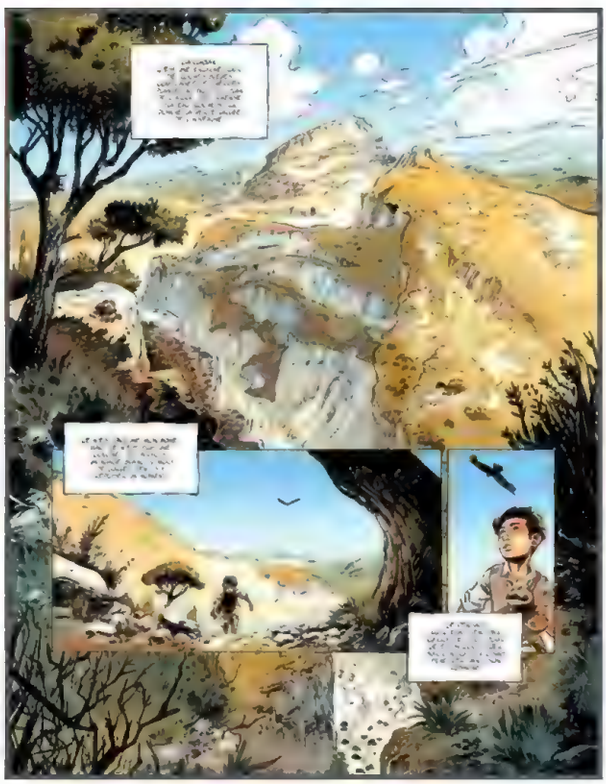
From Alice to Zorro, from classic adventure stories to modern French autobiographies, literary works are being adapted into comic-book form. **Dominic Bliss** discovers the secrets of turning great novels into great graphic novels

Literary types can still be a bit sniffy about comic books and graphic novels, especially in the English-speaking world. Not so in France and Belgium, however. Here, thanks to the long-established tradition of Franco-Belgian comics, fans of fiction switch seamlessly between reading novels and reading comic books (or *bandes dessinées*).

This helps explain why so many classic French novels have been adapted into graphic form. Albert Camus, Marcel Proust, Jules Verne, Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo… some of the most famous stories in the language translate brilliantly to panel layout.

There have been plenty of English-language literary adaptations, as we'll see shortly, but let's begin on the other side of the Channel. One much-loved writer who is now getting the comic-book treatment is Marcel Pagnol. During the early and mid-1900s, he wrote a series of bucolic novels, autobiographies and plays set in rural Provence including *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des Sources*. Pagnol died in 1974 but his grandson Nicolas Pagnol is now overseeing adaptation of all his stories by French publisher Grand Angle. Three of them (*La Gloire de mon Père, Merlusse* and *Topaze*) have already been published, with 12 more due by 2020. Quite a project.

Four of Marcel Pagnol's stories have been adapted into films, adding to their mass appeal. But his lesser-known works have drifted into obscurity. Nicolas is hoping that by releasing comic-book versions of the famous novels alongside the forgotten ones, he might inject new popularity into his grandfather's work.

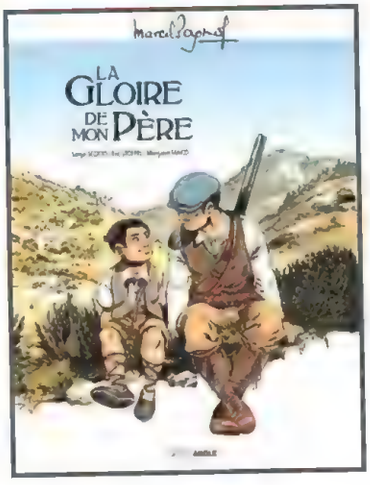


Right: *La Gloire de mon Père* is the first volume of Marcel Pagnol's childhood memoirs, in which he develops a love for the countryside

"My goal is to get my grandfather's work discovered by a new generation," he explains to *Comic Heroes*, "but also to help those who already know his work from a long time ago to rediscover it. The younger generation read fewer and fewer novels nowadays. This is a way of introducing them to a new universe. Say 100 youngsters read the comic books, then perhaps 10 of those go on to read my grandfather's books. It's a stepping stone."

As it happens, Marcel Pagnol was a prolific filmmaker as well as an author, and his interest in the visual as well as the verbal is a bonus. "Marcel's works are very cinematographic, so they totally lend themselves to comic book adaptation," says Nicolas. "It's another way of putting them on a stage."

Left & below: The graphic adaptation reflects the young protagonist's sense of the grandeur of nature – and as the cover makes clear, focuses equally on his relationship with his father



The respected comic-book writers Nicolas chose for the adaptations – Eric Stoffel and Serge Scotto – agree that Marcel's very visual imagination makes their task that much easier.

"Marcel thinks in both images and words at the same time," they say. "He is as much a writer as a filmmaker, and he's a master of dialogue. There is a direct relationship between cinematographic storyboard and comic books. Putting a story on the page is like putting it on the stage. Pagnol is not only the greatest writer >

of popular literature in the 20th century, a great storyteller and an unmatched expert on the human soul, but he's perfect for comic book adaptation."

Given the early 20th-century rural settings of Pagnol's works, his grandson chose artists with very traditional, *ligne claire*, almost old-fashioned styles: Morgann Tanco, Eric Hubsch and A. Dan, for example.

"The designs can't be too modern," Nicolas explains, "because Marcel is trans-generational. He communicates to both children and adults. The style of drawing needs to be right in the middle of that demographic. It could never be a manga version, for example. That would be impossible." He says it was a balance that was tricky to strike.

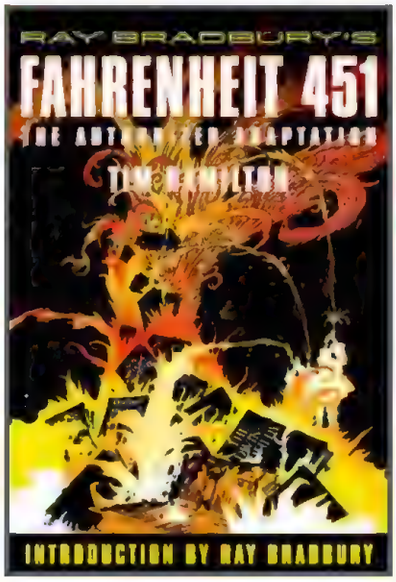
As guardian of his grandfather's work, he had final say over all art, design and storylines. "Saying that, I have given the artists and writers a lot of freedom."

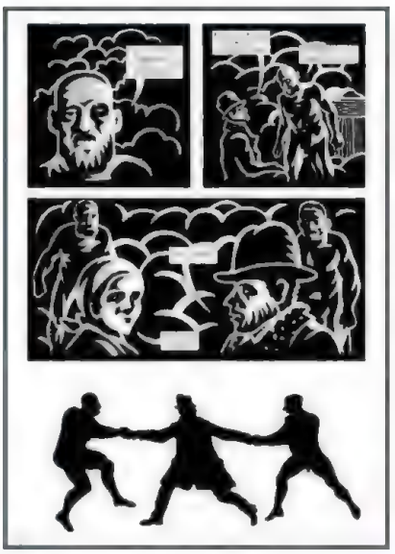
BUILDING ON THE ORIGINAL

Another comic-book writer/artist given plenty of freedom is Emmanuel Moynot, who has adapted a very famous French novel by Irène Némirovsky called *Suite Française*, all about German-occupied France in the Second World War. It was made into a film in 2014.

Poynot, who has created well over 30 comic books during his career, some of them adapted from novels, says he tries never to respect the original books too closely. "I decided a long time ago that I needed to tell the story myself, and to present it as a story I had invented. If you try to respect the original too much you end up not actually doing any writing. You simply illustrate the original book, and that isn't my way of doing things."

Poynot says that for comic-book artist/writers, like himself, it's crucial to use both skills to





Above: Jaromír 99's woodcut-style art adds a suitably surreal atmosphere to the adaptation of Kafka's *The Castle* published in 2013 by SelfMadeHero.

Below: Even works well known from film versions gain richness in comics form, whether it's Tim Hamilton's stark artwork on *Fahrenheit 451* or Mike Ploog's lush *Frankenstein*.

really leave one's mark on the work – a bit like film directors who deviate from the original book in order to produce their own work. "If you respect the original too much, you end up bowing down in front of the author you're adapting. You must put yourself at the same level as that author so that you're both telling a story together."

This is not just some sort of Gallic arrogance. Several adaptations in the English-speaking world have used a similar approach to great effect. In 2009, David Zane Mairowitz and Alain Korkos reworked Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, but rather than compete with the famous tale of mental anguish in 19th century St Petersburg, they gave the story its own identity by moving its setting to modern-day Russia.

Steve Niles and Elman Brown use scratchy, blurry, black-and-white art in their graphic version of Richard Matheson's post-apocalyptic vampire story, *I Am Legend*, to make the novel a lot more poignant and disorientating than the later Will Smith movie did.

In Robert Crumb's 2009 adaptation of the first book of the Bible, *The Book of*

Genesis, you immediately notice how the cult cartoonist's trademark psychedelic style works perfectly with the more eyebrow-raising Old Testament stories. Crumb took five years to create his work, using text from the King James Version and some of Robert Alter's translations.

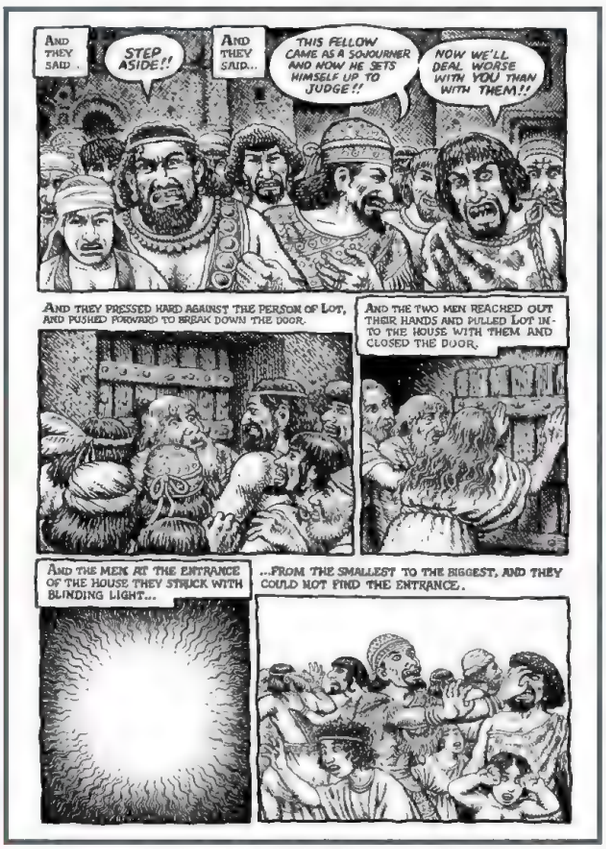
Eyebrows were certainly raised by the 1975 graphic novel version of Anne Desclos's (writing as Pauline Reage) erotic *Story of O*. In Guido Crepax's adaptation this tale of no-holds-barred S&M becomes "graphic" in an additional sense.

ADDED DIMENSIONS

Adaptations can work in very different ways. In ghost stories such as Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, the supernatural can gain detail and solidity akin to that in a live-action film while retaining that even more chilling cerebral dimension. Horror stories such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* allow for the monsters to be depicted in all their gruesome splendour, so that they impact on the reader even more viscerally. And the many Shakespeare adaptations use illustrations to unlock the Bard's often perplexing language.

Dozens of famous works have been adapted into comic book form in English: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the Biggles and the Sherlock Holmes stories, *The Call of the Wild*, *Ivanhoe*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Moby Dick*, *Oliver Twist*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Tarzan*, *Treasure Island*, *Ulysses*, *The War of the Worlds*, *Zorro* to name but a few.

More recent novels are getting graphic makeovers too. Comics publishers as varied as Marvel, Tokyopop, Yen Press and Del Rey Books are working with mainstream prose fiction publishers. Often the comic-book versions aren't straight adaptations but rather offshoots, prequels or side stories using characters from the original. Best-selling novelists such as Stephen King, James Patterson, Terry Pratchett, Stephenie Meyer and Janet Evanovich have all been given the graphic novel treatment. It's all about cross-pollination, with publishers on both sides of the divide hoping to attract new readers.

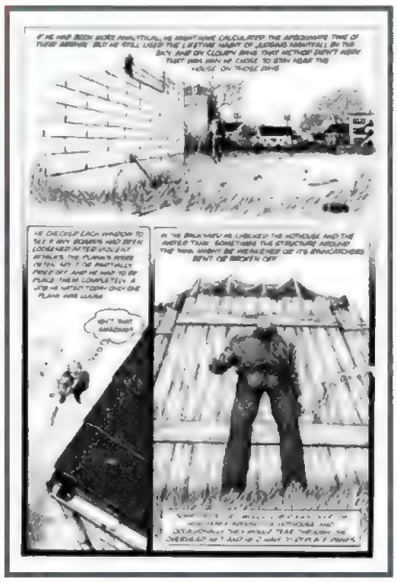

AND THEY SAID...
STEP ASIDE!!
AND THEY SAID...
THIS FELLOW CAME AS A SOJOURNER AND NOW HE SETS HIMSELF UP TO JUDGE!!
NOW WE'LL DEAL WORSE WITH YOU THAN WITH THEM!!
AND THEY PRESSED HARD AGAINST THE PERSON OF LOT, AND PUSHED FORWARD TO BREAK DOWN THE DOOR.
AND THE TWO MEN REACHED OUT THEIR HANDS AND PULLED LOT IN-TO THE HOUSE WITH THEM AND CLOSED THE DOOR.
AND THE MEN AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE HOUSE THEY STRUCK WITH BLINDING LIGHT...
...FROM THE SMALLEST TO THE BIGGEST, AND THEY COULD NOT FIND THE ENTRANCE.

Yet, unlike cinema adaptations which can end up being more famous than the novels they are based on, none of these comic-book adaptations has ever eclipsed the source material – even in the French-speaking world. "The written word is given a sort of religious reverence where pictures are not," explains Emmanuel Poynot. "When it comes to adaptations, people always consider the text as more important. That's the fault of the Bible. In the Bible it says: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.' That's a serious mistake, because ideas come before words. Words, just like pictures, should serve ideas. You should never forget that when you're adapting a story."

Poynot even suggests that since they lack images, novels can sometimes fail to express all the ideas they need to. This, he concludes, is where comic books truly trump their prose counterparts. "Novelists are held back because they can't draw. They're obliged to describe it instead. And that is a weakness." CH

Above: Trailblazing underground comix artist Robert Crumb tackled the Bible as literature, making a point of rendering *just* the text and [illegible]

Below: Artist Elman Brown's detailed mezzotint-like rendering gives the graphic novel *I Am Legend* an almost documentary realism and depth.



COMICS UNLIMITED?

It's expensive buying comics, whether in print or digitally. **David Barnett** investigates the pros and cons of an alternative that's growing in popularity, but remains controversial: digital streaming

Take almost any modern form of entertainment and you can chart the different and evolving ways in which we consume it. Literature, music and movies have followed a very similar path in recent years: at first, you owned a physical artefact, whether it was a book, a CD or a box-set; then came the revolution which saw us downloading digital versions of these to our tablets, phones and smart TVs.

Now there is a newer – and sometimes contentious – way for us to consume our popular culture, one which doesn't see us owning a product at all, whether physical or digital: subscription streaming.

And it would seem that more of us are moving towards reading our comics in this way, just as we listen to music via Spotify, watch TV shows and movies on Netflix and "borrow" books from Amazon via Kindle Unlimited.

The Marvel Unlimited platform has been offering a subscription service for some time: for US$9.99 a month (about £6 to £7, depending on fluctuating exchange rates) you get an "all you can eat" buffet service of Marvel back issues.

ComiXology, the Amazon-owned market-leading platform for digital comics, announced a similar offering in May, comiXology Unlimited, at US$5.99 a month. (Although this is currently US only, it has plans to roll out to global customers further down the line.)

The biggest advantages of a subscription service are obvious: for a once-a-month payment, you can read as many comics as you like, compared to buying individual issues at anything from 70p or so up to three or four pounds a time. And there's also the space factor: digital comic files are quite large, and downloads might quickly fill up your tablet. With a streaming service, you're essentially reading online rather than downloading.

That's not to say that with these platforms you can't download – and doing so negates one of the potential drawbacks in subscription services, the need to have a wi-fi or internet connection in order to read, which might end up costly or impractical on the move.

WHAT DO THEY OFFER?

But perhaps the biggest problem with subscription services is the availability of comics. Unlike Spotify, which has the latest music available on the day of release, Marvel Unlimited offers issues six months after publication date. If you're a die-hard fan you'll be wanting to buy them instead, either digitally or in paper form, as they come out.

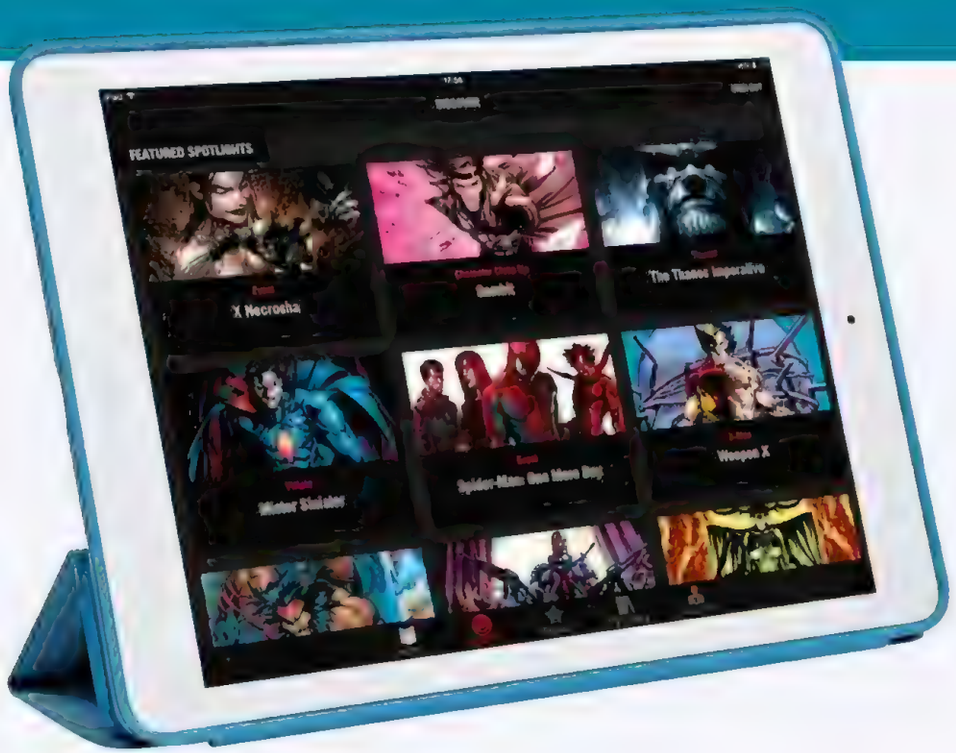
Journalist Todd Allen has made something of a career of studying the explosion in digital comics, >

IMAGES COURTESY OF THE RESPECTIVE PROPRIETORS. IPAD DESIGN TM APPLE INC

“FOR ONE PAYMENT A MONTH YOU CAN READ AS MANY COMICS AS YOU LIKE”

AAA AHHHHH HH
Mal, Molly, what in the Joan Jett are you DOING?!
April, the only thing we found by the lake were gross spiders--
--So we came looking for you--
--Because the spiders were so gross--
But mostly because we couldn't find anything
Just keep it down, will ya?
Yeah, this is a stealth mission, ya dweebs
We're never going to figure this out if we can't even find--
AAHHOORRR

Left: Many indie titles are becoming available through subscription services, potentially reaching a wider audience than ever.



and in 2014 published a book, *The Economics of Digital Comics*. He says: "The thing that makes Marvel Unlimited different is the update schedule. You know there's going to be new content on Monday morning – the six-month-delayed new issues and then some random older material. They've been the best at establishing that schedule and expectations of new material. It isn't at all clear what kind of updates comiXology Unlimited will be having, and really, that's more up to the participating publishers than comiXology."

According to comiXology, its own new service offers the chance to "explore selections from thousands of incredible titles, like *The Walking Dead, Attack On Titan, Hellboy, Adventure Time, Peanuts, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Lumberjanes, Saga, The Umbrella Academy, Outcast, Transformers*, with more on the way."

Not, however, from the Big Two – Marvel, of course, has its bases covered here, and DC doesn't seem to have made a big thing of providing its own content digitally.

Admittedly there's more to the comics landscape than just Marvel and DC. Just as Marvel Unlimited offers you the chance to read a vast range of old comics that may be hard to find, expensive or not available in trade paperback form, comiXology Unlimited is playing up the idea of opening up new frontiers for comics readers. "You may have heard of *Love And Rockets*, Krazy Cat and Ignatz, or *Lumberjanes*, but had no idea where to start reading or what collection to buy. Now you can simply start reading all these great titles today," said John D. Roberts, cofounder of comiXology.

Of course, comiXology and Marvel Unlimited might be the biggest players, but they're not the only game in town. One of the growing rivals is LINE Webtoon, which says it has 30 million monthly readers and, rather than simply acting as a portal to existing comics, it's offering original series as a kind of indie counterpoint to the big corporate sites.

According to spokeswoman Courtney Greenberg, "It has attracted men and women alike as it offers something for hardcore and casual comic readers with a wealth of new comics from famed and amateur creators alike, including the likes of Emmy award winning artist Dean Haspiel, *2 Broke Girls* star Beth Behrs and internet sensation Michelle Phan, and a large range of genres: from super hero and romance, to slice of life and adventure/fantasy."

This page: Marvel Unlimited gives access to recent releases from six months ago plus a wider back catalogue

Opposite: The new service from comiXology (currently US-only) concentrates on indie titles, including mould-breaking comics such as *Lumberjanes*

SERIES
CHARACTERS
CREATORS
COMIC EVENTS
Invincible Iron Man (2015 - Present)
Doctor Strange (2015 - Present)
Deadpool (2015 - Present)
All-New, All-Different Avenger...
Amazing Spider-Man (2015 - Pre...
Star Wars (2015 - Present)
Daredevil (2015 - Present)
ALL SERIES
Doc
Daredevil: Battlin' Jack Murdock (2007)
Doc Samson (2006)
Doctor Doom and the Masters of Evil (2009)
Doctor Octopus: Negative Exposure (2001 - 2001)
Doctor Strange (1968 - 1969)
Doctor Strange (1974 - 1988)
Doctor Strange (2015 - Present)
Doctor Strange: Season One (2011 - Present)
Doctor Strange: The Oath (2006 - 2007)

Webtoon is embracing the Netflix ethos of "If you like X then you'll love Y" in a bid to bring indie comics to the notice of discerning readers, particularly indie comics that might not normally get the exposure they deserve in such a packed market. Webtoon is about to launch what it calls its Daily Feed tool in order to – as it puts it – "maximise discovery and consumption" through recommendations.

Given that Netflix and Spotify are now firmly part of our cultural landscape, is streaming comics in this manner going to be the future of how we read?

Todd Allen isn't sure it'll be quite so clear-cut. "I don't think there's any one way forward," he says. He foresees "different reading modes for different people, with the subscription services functioning as a bit more of an on-demand library where you can check out at will. You can use Marvel Unlimited in a couple different ways – either you're keeping semi-current by reading the six-month-old releases as they come out or you can go into the back catalogue and read things that might not even be available in print right now. However, if you need your Marvel now (pun intended), you're still buying things as they come out."

But while all this might be exciting for readers, how is it going to affect creators? As an artist, writer, colourist or anyone else involved in the creation of a comic, you know where you stand either with payment for work-for-hire or with a percentage fee from a digital comic sold via comiXology. In the case of Spotify, there have been high-profile cases where artists have complained of the measly royalties they get or, like Taylor Swift, removed their back catalogues from the service altogether.

WHAT WILL IT MEAN?

When comiXology Unlimited was announced at the end of May, a number of creators took to Twitter to say they hadn't been consulted over the launch, and wondering what it would mean for them exactly. One of them was Jamie McKelvie, artist on *The Wicked + The Divine*, *Phonogram* and *Young Avengers*, who has doubts about subscription services generally. "Creators would see a significant loss in income, I think," says McKelvie. "You only have to look at how it's decimated income for bands to see what could happen. Most comics creators only just get by as it is."

However, there is a positive side, he says, in that he doesn't see comiXology Unlimited as another Spotify: "it's more of a taster service. While people will be able to try out the first story arcs for no extra cost other than the subscription fee, it'll hopefully >

inspire them to continue reading the story by buying further books."

Todd Allen agrees with both of those points. "Can a creator make a living strictly through one of these services? That seems highly unlikely unless those services get a lot more subscribers," he says. "From a business perspective, it's supplementary income, a different way to get some of that casual reader market – and in the case of Marvel, [to] hang on to some readers who aren't feeling $3.99 worth of love for the current publishing slate instead of having them slip away."

Yet although modes of delivery might be converging, actually lumping comics with music and TV is like comparing apples and pears. Creators such as McKelvie do like the digital model: "It gets our work out to a much wider audience. Not everyone has a comic shop near them, or space for tons of comics. And we're seeing a lot of people buying print books after trying stuff out digitally."

But this last fact arises because in one key respect, digital comics are not the same as those other media, McKelvie adds: "There's still a collectability to comics that it doesn't share with TV or music." Casual readers as well as collectors may still prefer the physical object: "While reading comics digitally is fine – I like how they look on my iPad Pro – reading a print comic is a different experience. Watching TV [whether] from a DVD or a stream is an identical experience."

Above: It's somehow entirely appropriate that a comic as tech-savvy as *Phonogram* should be available digitally. .

> "READING DIGITALLY IS FINE BUT NOT THE SAME EXPERIENCE"

So while there have never been as many choices as there are now for the comic reader with regard to how they get their regular fix, the game is still wide open when it comes to the future of comic reading. CH

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ROCKET Men

DAVID BARNETT TALKS TO LOS BROS HERNANDEZ – AND THEIR FAMOUS FANS

Thirty-five years is a long time in comics. Aside from the legacy characters of Marvel and DC and the thundering juggernaut that is *2000 AD*, there isn't a lot that's had that kind of staying power.

Apart from *Love and Rockets*.

And 35 years after it was born as a self-published magazine back in 1981, *Love and Rockets* this year enters its next phase as a regular-sized comic book. The series that's arguably the most beloved indie of them all shows no signs of slowing – and why would it?

"I make comics, so stopping or even getting bored has never been an option," says Gilbert Hernandez simply. Together with his brother Jaime – and in the early days their older brother Mario, who edited the early editions and contributed his own strips – Los Bros Hernandez have earned their place in the comics firmament.

If you've never read *Love and Rockets*, you have a treat ahead of you. But with three-and-a-half decades of stories to go at, where to start? Well, although there have been many noteworthy tales over the years, fans point to two shining highlight series: Jaime's "Locas" and the "Heartbreak Soup" stories from Gilbert (known as Beto).

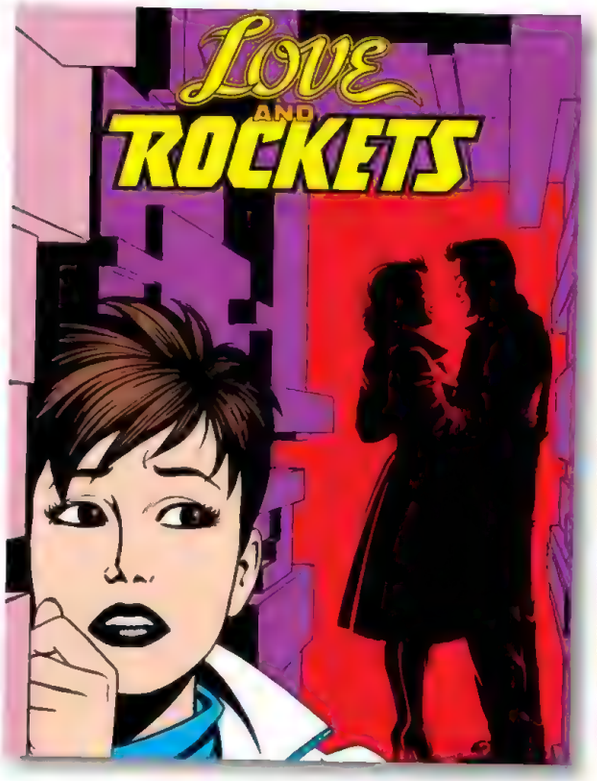
Even trying to describe Locas makes it sound utterly insane... It starts off as the story of a young "prosolar mechanic" called Maggie who inhabits a weird world of retro rocket ships and dinosaurs, but it slowly becomes a more down-to-earth tale of life in the Californian town of Hoppers with an ever-expanding cast revolving around Maggie and her on-off lover Hopey.

"That was an organic move," Jaime explains. "As the storyline developed I became more interested in the characters and their home lives. I felt Southern California punk and lowrider culture was far more interesting and inventive than dinosaurs and robots, and I wanted to put it out there because I felt it was not being displayed correctly in any storytelling form I knew. It was sort of a 'truth is stranger than fiction' situation."

TEENAGE KICKS

As the years drew on, Jaime moved away from the rampant fun of the early issues to stories that delivered a visceral and very real emotional punch – ask any *Love and Rockets* fan about the "Death of Speedy" storyline, for example, and watch them start to tear up.

In fact, let's ask Sadie Dupuis of Massachusetts indie rockers Speedy Ortiz, named for the titular character in the highly-charged storyline, which saw Hoppers on the brink of a gang war with neighbouring Dairytown. Dupuis says: "I was re-reading the collected *Love and Rockets* during a somewhat intense moment of personal turmoil. Two close friends had passed away suddenly, I was going through a breakup with a long-term partner I also played in a band with, and I was about to move to a totally new city where I didn't know anyone. I feel like all of that stuff has come up in *Love and Rockets*, especially those issues where they're all in their mid 20s. Which includes the character Speedy Ortiz's sudden death.



ALL IMAGES © GILBERT HERNANDEZ / JAIME HERNANDEZ

Above and opposite: Rather than standard superhero fare, Los Bros Hernandez acknowledge that they learned to draw from teen titles such as Archie, hence their distinctive "clean line" art style.

"The way Jaime portrays Speedy's friends and family grieving that death seemed to me like such a true representation of the impact of loss, and the ways in which we cope with loss. I'd been writing a lot of songs for a side project, some of which were about these friends I was grieving, so I stole Speedy Ortiz's name for it as a kind of tribute. One of the songs from that early round of demos is actually called 'Speedy Ortiz' and mentions a 'punk show back in Hoppers' and 'flies on the ceiling' and a couple of other nods to that storyline."

Dupuis says she leans slightly more towards the Locas stories >

"STOPPING OR GETTING BORED HAS NEVER BEEN AN OPTION"

PHOTO COURTESY OF FANTAGRAPHICS

because "I like comics with punk bands" – one of the fixtures of Jaime's stories is the band Ape Sex – but "some of my favourite storylines have been Beto's." She adds as a general point: "The art is beautiful, the characters are so emotionally resonant and nuanced. It's a complete world. I've never been so lost inside of a story as I have in Hoppers and Palomar."

Palomar is the location for Gilbert's stories, a rural Latin American community which modern life seems to have taken a big detour around. His cast of characters is as large as Jaime's, a vast tapestry of life that comes across like a Pedro Almodóvar magic realist movie.

"I wanted to make something that would last," says Gilbert. "Something I would always be proud of. I wanted to do something that I'd never seen in American comic books. Palomar was from my impressions of childhood to adulthood. Nobody else has lived my life, so that made it original to me. Once I began Palomar I wanted it to grow like life. It will be finished only when I stop doing comics."

Top: Hard to believe that something which still feels so fresh began life way back in the 1980s **Above:** One of the now-iconic early covers. **Opposite page:** Music, and particularly the punk-rock scene, have always been a big element in the brothers' lives and their work.

The Hernandez boys grew up in Oxnard, California, with a Mexican father and a Texas-born mother. Jaime says: "My hometown greatly influenced Hoppers, mainly because it was the life I knew and one that I felt had a lot of great stories to tell that most people had never heard. Southern California without the entertainment industry, if you like."

So did Jaime's own early years experiences inform the adventures of the Hoppers gang?

"Not as many as it would seem," he responds. "My characters write a lot of the stories. Most of my experiences come in when I put myself in my characters' shoes and see how far they can go and still keep it real."

COMPLETE CONTROL

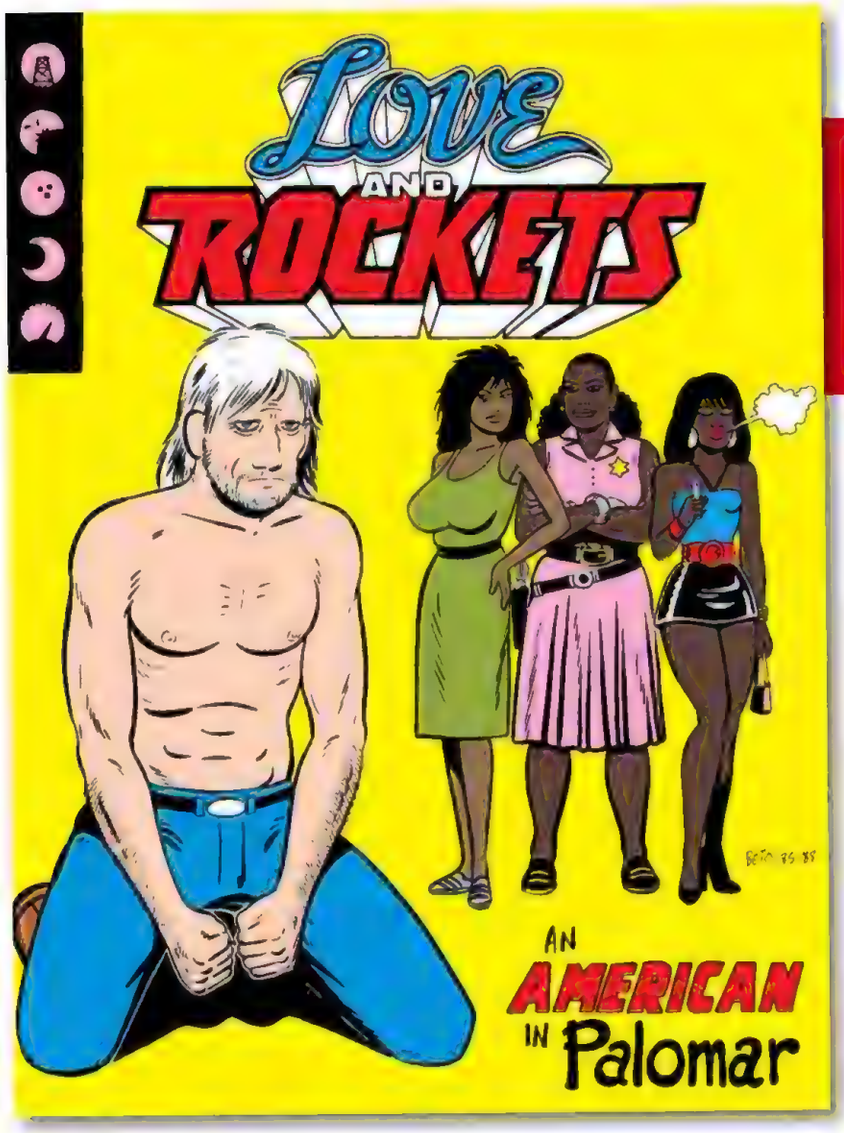
Love and Rockets started off as a self-published comic in 1981, printed up and sold for a dollar at conventions by the brothers. In their first editorial they wrote: "We, the brothers (Jaime, 'Bert, and Mario) Hernandez, have tried to get into the comics jungle for a few years now, but could never seem to make the right connections. But now editor (and future contributor) Mario decided upon himself that it was time to do it ourselves. Our own comics with our own ideas; our own mistakes and our own accomplishments."

Gilbert says: "I never had much interest in going to work for Marvel or DC at the time because learning to do comics their way didn't seem like worth the effort. By then I had zero interest in them and when given the opportunity to do our own comic, I simply shrugged and put in what comics I was doing >

"I WANTED TO DO SOMETHING I'D NEVER SEEN IN AMERICAN COMICS"

LA LUCHA

XAIME 95
BETO/95



"ONE OF THE FINEST PIECES OF FICTION OF THE LAST 35 YEARS"

This page and opposite: Whether down-to-earth or tinged with the fantastic, one of the greatest strengths of *Love and Rockets* is the individuality of all the characters.

for myself at the time. For some time I'd wanted to do comics that people actually might see, just not with any mainstream limits."

That self-published first issue came to the attention of Gary Groth at Fantagraphics, the indie comics publishing house he'd co-founded in 1976. By the following year, 1982, *Love and Rockets* was professionally published. Groth maintained a very light editorial touch for Jaime and Gilbert.

Gilbert explains: "I sent a copy to Fantagraphics to be reviewed and they offered to publish it. We took that as a good omen. There was little to no editorial input except for spelling corrections and story clarifications."

Gilbert adds that even the first Fantagraphics edition didn't draw a great deal of attention – though this was the start of the indie comics explosion of the early 1980s and there was a lot of competition. But slowly interest started to build. That first incarnation of *Love and Rockets* ran to 50 magazine-sized issues, ending in 1996. In 2001-2007 *Love and Rockets* re-emerged in standard comic-book format, and since 2008 it has been published as an annual 104-page album.

From later this year, though, it returns to the standard comic book format, and with a much more frequent publication schedule, which will delight fans. This is, essentially, volume four of *Love and Rockets*, which is another good omen for Gilbert: "It will return to be a comic book again beginning with volume 4 #1, *Volume 4* being my favourite Black Sabbath album, by the way. *Beatles For Sale* is up there as well as P!nk's *I'm Not Dead*. I feel having *Love and Rockets* volume 4 is like a rebirth."

It's not, however, a rebirth in the DC Comics sense... There are no reboots in *Love and Rockets*. The characters have aged exponentially along with their creators and their fanbase ever since 1981.

WELCOME TO PARADISE

That's one of the attractions for *Love and Rockets* fan Neil Gaiman, who told *Comic Heroes*: "We've watched these characters grow and change and break our hearts. You're talking about two master craftsmen who have stayed at the top of their game for a third of a century.

"I don't really understand why the material of *Love and Rockets* isn't widely regarded as one of the finest pieces of fiction of the last 35 years, because it is. I suspect it's the vast quantity of material: where do you start, how do you approach these lives, these people, their stories?"

According to Jaime, time moving on in Hoppers and Palomar was always part of the deal: "It was important in the sense that >

"IT'S FAR BEYOND WHAT WE EXPECTED TO HAPPEN"

ageing them along with the rest of us brought them closer to us. Made them seem more flesh and blood than just lines on paper." Gilbert adds: "I liked how the characters aged in the comic strip *Gasoline Alley*. I thought that would give my characters more sympathy."

Another huge fan is Gail Simone. While writing *Wonder Woman* for DC, she was invited to a charity event to raise money for a domestic abuse shelter in Portland, Oregon. The Hernandez brothers were also guests. She recalls: "I pretty much figured Gilbert and Jaime had to be some sort of divine comics creatures sent to make the rest of us all feel inadequate, and they were two of the very small handful of creators I was a little terrified to meet for that reason. I thought, 'Man, what if the best people ever to make comics are awful?'"

EVER FALLEN IN LOVE?

Gilbert had just finished a short run writing DC's *Birds of Prey*, a female-led team book Simone had just taken over writing. Gilbert's issues, although "charming and inventive" according to Simone, hadn't found commercial success.

She says: "At the event they were busy doing free sketches for kids by the dozen. They seemed very intense and focused, so I worked up my courage after a while and said the goofiest thing possible. 'Hi, Gilbert, my name is Gail, and I followed you on *Birds of Prey*.'

"And he immediately gets this big smile and says, 'You mean you SAVED *Birds of Prey*!' and he gave me a big hug and I pretty much fell in love with them forever and if anyone says something bad about either of them, they will get my fist in their snoot. Before I left, without being asked, they drew sketches of Wonder Woman and Black Canary for me, and it's a true fact that if there was a fire in my home, I'd go back in to get those, flames or not. To be that kind to a new writer he'd never even met... I had to struggle to fight back tears.

"Gilbert and Jaime prove you can be a transcendent talent and still be an amazing person. One of the reasons I love comics more than any other medium is because *this* is the ground where they chose to plant their flag."

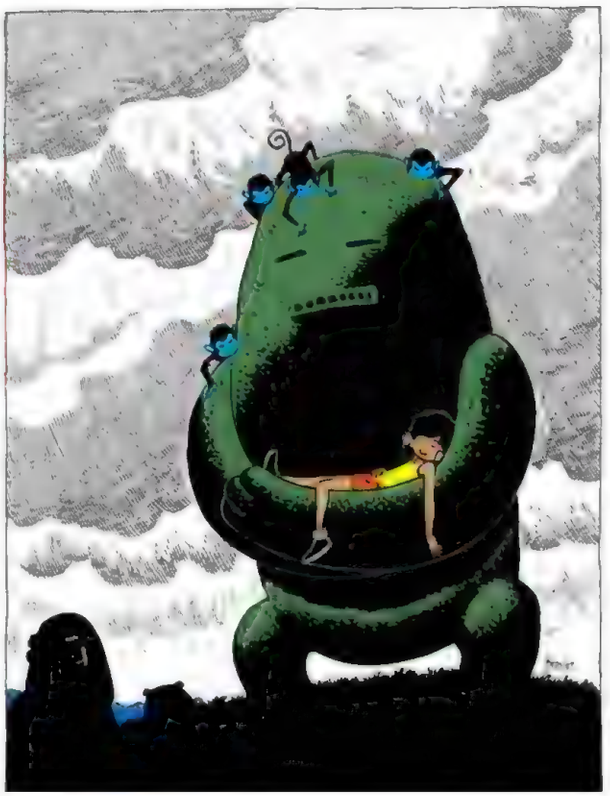
The brothers still seem a bit surprised that people have taken the characters to their hearts so much. Indeed, most *Love and Rockets* fans are a little bit in love with Maggie, or Hopey, or both.

"It's great," says Jaime. "I'm happy when the readers are still willing to support them even with their faulty personalities. Sometimes when I have them make a bonehead move, I wonder if their popularity will suffer."

Gilbert agrees. "It's the greatest reward to hear how much the fans like our comics. It's far beyond what we expected to happen."

The brothers are looking forward to a more frequent publication schedule – especially Jaime: "I'm looking forward to having closure more often," he says. "It became harder living with a story for a year. I started to change things in the stories feeling the ideas were old and tired, when in reality nobody had seen them besides me. Duh!"

But after 35 years, can they keep going? Have they still got enough stories in them? "I'll never, ever have no more stories, whether they're in *Love and Rockets* or not," says Gilbert. "I've looked at what I've planned for future comics and there's probably more than I'll ever be able to complete." CH



Above: The "rockets" aspect is perhaps not as prominent as in the earliest issues, but there's still a magical-realist feel to Jaime's work in particular
Left: Beto and Jaime have been at the top of their game for 35 years.
Opposite page: Hopey and Maggie remain fan favourite characters

XAIME 89

TRUE BRIT

The first Marvel superhero created specially for Britain turns 40 this year. **David Barnett** reveals his true history

IMAGES © MARVEL COMICS

Captain Britain debuted with a splash – and a free gift!

FEATURING THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND NICK FURY AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D.!
IN FULL COLOUR!
THE NEWEST--AND GREATEST--SUPERHERO OF ALL!
CAPTAIN BRITAIN
10P
FOOL! NOTHING CAN HARM DR. SYNNE!
HE'S RIGHT! I CAN'T PIERCE HIS FORCE FIELD! HE'S WON!

Why would the UK be free of its own villains, eh?

Forty years ago, American comics were hard to find on UK newsagents' shelves and you'd probably get your superhero fix from the output of Marvel's UK arm. Weekly, black-and-white comics such as *Mighty World Of Marvel* and *Spider-Man Comics Weekly* featured old stories sliced up (not always coherently or chronologically) into six- or eight-page instalments, and in any given comic you might find the Fantastic Four, the Avengers and even Marvel's 1970s version of Dracula rubbing up against each other.

FEATURING THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND NICK FURY AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D.!
IN FULL COLOUR!
CAPTAIN BRITAIN
10P
YOU DEFEATED ME LAST TIME HURRICANE!
NOW IT'S MY TURN!
WRONG, CHUM! THIS TIME I'LL FINISH YOU OFF!

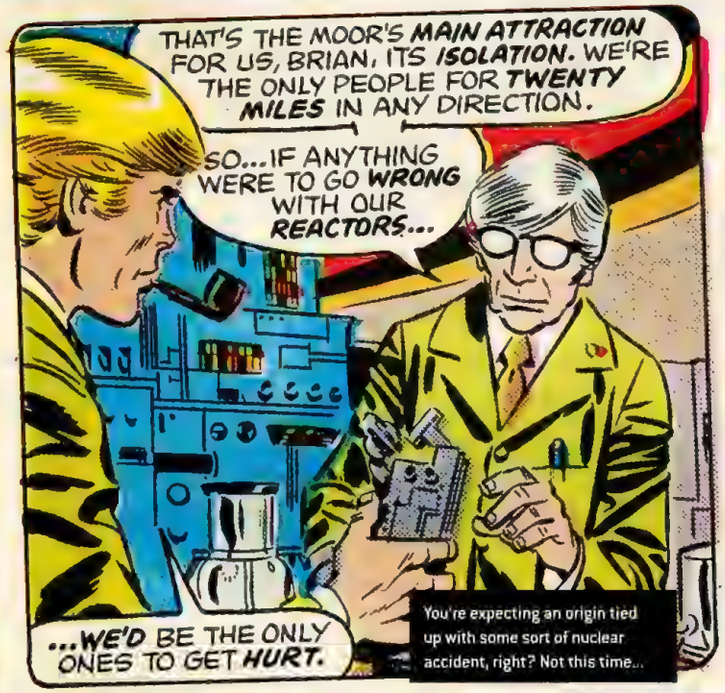
Though British in setting, the comic had all the usual Marvel magic.

Then, in 1976, something changed. Britain got its own superhero, an original character in brand new stories. For readers of the time, it was quite an astonishing moment. Marvel Comics, a legendary beast in a far-off, almost mythical New York, actually knew we existed here in dull old 1970s Britain. And they gave us Captain Britain.

It was the perfect time. The Queen's Silver Jubilee was on the horizon, an almost universally welcomed time for national celebration (with, it seemed to a small child, little of the cynicism and eye-rolling such pomp and ceremony might attract today). Punk was in the ascendent, with postcards of gravity-defying mohicans taking their place alongside those featuring London buses and Big Ben. We'd had a long, hot, glorious summer. And then Stan Lee and Co gave us our very own superhero.

When the first issue of *Captain Britain* came out in October 1976, even sceptical comic fans might have been suitably impressed at the creative team assembled for the title character's introductory story – Chris Claremont as writer, who had just begun what was to be his epic run on *The X-Men*, along with classic Hulk artist Herb Trimpe. The rest of us, though, were marvelling at the free Captain Britain cardboard mask and three little words

> "BRITAIN GOT ITS OWN ORIGINAL SUPERHERO, IN BRAND NEW STORIES"


THAT'S THE MOOR'S MAIN ATTRACTION FOR US, BRIAN. ITS ISOLATION. WE'RE THE ONLY PEOPLE FOR TWENTY MILES IN ANY DIRECTION.
SO...IF ANYTHING WERE TO GO WRONG WITH OUR REACTORS...
...WE'D BE THE ONLY ONES TO GET HURT.
You're expecting an origin tied up with some sort of nuclear accident, right? Not this time...

BY THE WAY, I'M VERY PLEASED WITH THE WAY YOU'RE WORKING OUT AS MY ASSISTANT...
BUT IT'S ONLY TEMPORARY, DR. TRAVIS, UNTIL THE NEW TERM BEGINS AT THAMES UNIVERSITY.

IN FULL COLOUR!
THE NEWEST-AND GREATEST-SUPERHERO OF ALL!
CAPTAIN BRITAIN
10P
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
THE OLD ORDER MUST END!
BRITAIN MUST FALL!
LONG LIVE OUR NEW FUEHRER!
THE TIMES
CAPTAIN BRITAIN AND CAPTAIN AMERICA DEAD
War comics were selling well in Britain at the time. Did Marvel's US creators pick up on the vibe?

above the masthead that we never, ever saw in Marvel weeklies: "In full colour!"

That first eight-page strip was naturally an origin story. We meet Brian Braddock, blonde of hair and blue of eye, scion of a moneyed British family with a nice manor tucked away, orphaned of course, thanks to a mysterious lab accident.

Brian is helping out as a research assistant at the secretive Darkmoor nuclear research facility, hidden in the Northumberland countryside. A villain – the Reaver – attacks, and Brian is chased into the forbidding moorland. Barely surviving a motorcycle accident, he is confronted by a vision of a grim-faced wizard and a beautiful woman; we will much later learn that this is Merlin and his daughter Roma. They offer him a choice: an amulet or a sword. Brian furiously thinks, "The symbol of bloodshed or the symbol of life?"

Brian chooses life, and with the amulet comes a natty red costume with a Union Flag full-face mask and a heraldic golden lion emblazoned on his chest. With much mayhap-ing and thou-ing, Merlin and Roma declare Brian to be Britain's "champion of good 'gainst the forces of evil" and, as Claremont has it in his closing caption, a legend is indeed born...

THE TRUTH AT LAST!

That's how Brian Braddock came to be Captain Britain. But what about the secret origin behind the comic book? Chris Claremont, of course, has the answers. "Stan Lee wanted to try something for the overseas market. Marvel had a nascent publishing programme in the UK which was reprinting old '60s strips and he wanted to find out how feasible it was to create an original weekly comic." Claremont laughs. "He was looking around for people to do it who weren't very expensive, and he decided on me and Herb Trimpe."

That wasn't quite the only reason, of course. Trimpe was living in Devon at the time, and Claremont, though he'd been in the States since he was very small, was actually born in North London.

> "STAN WAS LOOKING FOR PEOPLE TO DO IT WHO WEREN'T EXPENSIVE"

Claremont says: "Stan knew we were capable and, because of our links to the UK, that we were simpatico to the idea of a British hero. And at that time there wasn't really an established UK comics talent pool that Marvel drew on."

Stan gave Claremont and Trimpe free rein with the character. Many years later the artist's recollection was that someone else had designed the costume, but Claremont remembers: "Herb and I sat down and started talking things through. Herb did some costume designs and then I built the character up from that. The

The original costume design was striking enough, though it didn't really say "Britain" specifically.

The content was produced in the US, with covers often by Marvel's top artists, like John Buscema.

challenge was how to make him a unique hero for the British Isles, in the same way that Captain America was unique to the US. The idea was to reach back to the Arthurian legends, to take the little bit of the tradition of superheroes and heroism and mix that with mysticism."

Claremont and Trimpe toyed with the idea of having Captain Britain wield a sword, but eventually settled on a staff. "We decided a sword was too aggressive a concept," Claremont says. "Once you start swinging a sword around, people get cut. That wasn't really the statement we wanted to make."

Claremont and Trimpe created a cast of characters for Captain Britain's London, including an irascible Metropolitan Police inspector, Dai Thomas, who was not very well disposed to Britain's new champion because his wife had been killed in a New York super-powered punch-up. There was Mary Jane-style love interest in the shape of Courtney Ross, a Flash Thompson-esque bully named Jacko Tanner, and a rogues gallery of foes including Hurricane, Dr Synne and Mastermind.

In those early issues, Claremont also created Betsy Braddock, a character he would later reintroduce to the X-Men as Psylocke, and the new hero also had his inevitable team-up with established star Captain America to face the Red Skull.

That was after Claremont's run, though – he left after just ten issues, following disagreements with the series editor Larry Lieber – Stan Lee's younger brother – about how the character should develop. "Larry is an artist and a writer," shrugs Claremont. "Like any creator he felt he could do it better, and I admit that with me he was dealing with writer with a not inconsiderable ego."

Captain Britain Weekly lasted less than a year, merging with Marvel UK's *Spider-Man* title after 39 issues in July 1977. Captain Britain continued to appear, however, in seven-page original stories in the merged comic, where the rest of the content was reprints, and Claremont returned to wrap up the storyline in six final instalments, drawn by no less than John Byrne, ending in December 1977.

There the story might have ended, but for the fact that Captain Britain seemed to be too good a character to languish for long. In 1979 Marvel UK launched *Hulk Comic* under the editorship of Briton Dez Skinn, who brought in British talent to create original strips, including one featuring a revival of '50s hero Black Knight, whom Merlin sent off on a mission to the mystical Otherworld... in the company of Captain Britain.

"THE IDEA WAS TO MIX SUPERHEROES WITH A LITTLE MYSTICISM"

FEATURING: THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D.!
IN FULL COLOUR!
THE NEWEST--AND GREATEST--SUPERHERO OF ALL!
CAPTAIN BRITAIN
10P
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
NO. 8
I MUST DESTROY THE HOVERCRAFT BEFORE THOSE THUGS GET ME WITH THEIR ENERGY BLASTS!
ALL-NEW ACTION AND THRILLS!
SEE THE U.K.'S CRIME FIGHTING SUPER-HERO IN...
RIOT ON REGENT STREET!
BONUS FEATURE
A FULL-COLOUR MAP OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S
BAXTER BUILDING!

The comic brought to Britain all the thrills readers had associated with Marvel's mythic New York.

IN FULL COLOUR!
THE NEWEST--AND GREATEST--SUPERHERO OF ALL!
CAPTAIN BRITAIN
10P
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
NO. 20
WEEK ENDING FEB. 23 1977
WE'RE IN TIME! YOUR BROTHER AND SISTER ARE STILL ALIVE!
BUT THEY WON'T BE FOR LONG--UNLESS WE DEFEAT THEIR NAZI KIDNAPPERS!

Captain America, though probably not Marvel's biggest name, was a natural guest star for the comic.

Following on from the Otherworld saga, writer Dave Thorpe and artist Alan Davis continued the adventures of Captain Britain in the monthly *Marvel Super Heroes*. When Thorpe left in 1981 he was replaced by Alan Moore, who by then had written for *2000 AD*, *Doctor Who Weekly* and the much-loved anthology *Warrior*, where he'd begun dissecting the superhero myth with Marvelman.

Moore and Davis soon embarked on a vast, omniverse spanning saga in which Captain Britain is sent to a parallel world where mutant Jim Jaspers has massacred all the superheroes. Brian Braddock discovers he is but one member of a multi-dimensional Captain Britain Corps and returns to the "regular" Marvel Earth to confront the rise of Jaspers all over again. It's an inventive, often brutal piece of work that cemented the reputations of Moore and Davis and lifted Captain Britain into the vanguard of the 1980s new wave of British comics. And today the "Jaspers' Warp" storyline remains perhaps one of the most fondly remembered in British comics.

"That really was Alan Moore's first deconstruction of the superhero," says writer Paul Cornell (more from him later). "Moore made such a cultural footprint, and his Captain Britain work is often the starting point for a lot of people to reference the themes in his work."

Like many other characters without their own title, Captain Britain was then utilised by a variety of writers, creating for him possibly one of the most complex backstories of any of Marvel's heroes. Claremont returned once more to the character with Alan Davis in 1987 when he made him the mainstay of the US Marvel title *Excalibur* – a team book featuring members of the X-Men working as Britain's first proper super-team.

A HERO BETRAYED!

"The idea," Claremont says, "was to take the glorious themes established in the Moore run – and after him by Jamie Delano – and present them for a wider audience, to bring them into the X-Men's world, the greater Marvel canvas. To our delight it was an incredible success and we had a rollicking good time."

With Captain Britain firmly established in the Marvel Universe, arguably his finest hour (at least since Moore and Claremont) came in 2008 in *Captain Britain and MI:13*, initially planned as an ongoing series, written by Paul Cornell.

> "IT WAS ALAN MOORE'S FIRST DECONSTRUCTION OF THE SUPERHERO"

Brian and Betsy Braddock are these days well integrated into the mainstream Marvel Universe.

Paul Cornell put Captain Britain and other British heroes centre stage in his *MI-13* series.

Though it lasted only 15 issues, *MI-13* is fondly remembered by UK Marvel fans... and its writer!

"I was familiar with Captain Britain and his origin story from a Marvel annual I had when I was a kid," says Cornell. "From that point I was fascinated with him but I didn't have much access to him until he started to appear in *Excalibur*, and then I got the Alan Moore run in the trade paperbacks."

Cornell first got his hands on the character for his Pete Wisdom limited series for Marvel Max... and he admits he made what he calls a "newbie mistake". "I wrote a ridiculous Captain Britain. I made him really over the top, especially with his speech. By the time *MI:13* came about, I wanted to create a role for him and do him properly."

As Cornell points out, though, Captain Britain has been subjected to "many indignities" in the past 40 years... He's been killed off and resurrected more than most heroes, and there's what Cornell calls a "fan myth" that Brian Braddock is actually an alcoholic. "He's been drunk twice, I think, in the comics," Cornell says. "Then his friends tell him to sort himself out and he does. That doesn't happen with real alcoholics. So I was quite determined that I wanted to show him in *MI:13* enjoying a beer."

MI:13 featured Captain Britain along with other British heroes such as Black Knight, Spitfire and Union Jack (of the Invaders) and occultist Pete Wisdom. It lasted a mere 15 issues, which was a pity, because in Cornell's hands Brian Braddock achieved a rare depth of character.

> "MI:13 WAS ONE OF MY FAVOURITE RUNS I'VE EVER DONE IN COMICS"

"It feels like some comic writers want to pick him apart," Cornell says. "I wanted to do something positive. *MI:13* was one of my favourite runs I've ever done in comics."

Captain Britain has been used since, of course, most notably in Jonathan Hickman's *New Avengers* run, where it's established that Braddock is the last of the Captain Britain Corps. Cornell has nothing but praise for Hickman's portrayal, and wasn't sad to see the end of the multiverse Caps. "I never had a lot of time for the Captain Britain Corps," he says. "He was just another aspect of the champion, one of potentially billions."

As the character celebrates his 40th year, there are rumours of a Captain Britain TV series in the works (Marvel says nothing's on the cards, but a team of indie producers are thought to be producing a showreel in the hope of getting the studio to bite). And Betsy Braddock is appearing in *X-Men: Apocalypse* (potentially throwing up complications if the Marvel Cinematic Universe ever wants to use Captain Britain, as the X-Men franchise is of course owned by Fox). It seems the bulldog spirit of the UK's number one superhero has never been more indomitable.

Would the man who created him and the writer who handled his last headline series ever consider giving him another go, though? "Hell, yes, I'd write him again!" says Chris Claremont.

"In a heartbeat," says Paul Cornell.

Which rather sounds like an authorial match made in heaven in this or any universe. Over to you, Marvel...

THE YOUNG ONES

BILL SIENKIEWICZ AND CHRIS CLAREMONT TALK TO **STEPHEN JEWELL** ABOUT THEIR CLASSIC NEW MUTANTS RUN

ALL IMAGES © MARVEL

Quite possibly the most memorable story arc featuring the Children of the Atom outside of the flagship *Uncanny X-Men*, Bill Sienkiewicz and long-time X-scribe Chris Claremont's run on *New Mutants* still seems bold and innovative more than three decades after its original publication in 1984. Now the arc – which encompasses 14 issues of *New Mutants*, from #18 to #31 – is receiving the attention it deserves and being reprinted (along with a story from 2003's *X-Men Unlimited* #43) in an oversized hardcover in IDW's Marvel Artist Select Series.

"When Bill and I were working on *New Mutants*," Claremont told *Comic Heroes*, "it was one of the most exciting, delightful and unexpected experiences I have ever had in comics, and I've been ridiculously fortunate enough to have a whole catalogue of those with various different artists, titles and characters. But the thing with Bill is that it really was a flash of inspiration on the part of Ann Nocenti, our editor, which just paid off better than any of us could have anticipated."

Claremont launched the junior X-team, the first X-Men spinoff, in 1982 with a graphic novel drawn by Bob McLeod, and had previously worked on *New Mutants* with more traditional-style illustrators. "Bob was an excellent artist and designer of character, and that was exactly what Louise Simonson [*Uncanny X-Men*'s then-editor] and I had in mind when we created the series," says Claremont.

> "ONE OF THOSE GAME-CHANGERS NO ONE SEES COMING"

Opposite: The Demo Bear, as Sienkiewicz drew it, was at least as much of a [illegible] as it was a [illegible] as much a [illegible] that it was much more engaging storytelling

But, he continues, "much like the original circumstances of 'The Death of Jean Grey' in *Uncanny X-Men*, Bill was what would be referred to in North American parlance as one of those out-of-left-field game-changers that no one sees coming. You could see it from the opening scene, if not the cover of our first issue together. You turn the page and suddenly the book had gone up to a totally different level in his presentation of character and scene. He was as good at presenting subtext as he was at presenting the objective action, so you never just >

BEFORE ILLYANA RASPUTIN CAN EVEN BEGIN HER ENCHANTMENTS, HOWEVER...
THE MONSTROUS AVATAR STRIKES...
...ITS CLAWS DOING NO HARM TO THE BODIES OF ITS HELPLESS CAPTIVES...
...ONLY TO THEIR SOULS.

THE SOLDIERS FOUND ME IN THE RUINS. BY HIS SIDE, THE ONLY SURVIVOR.
THEY USE MY PSI-TA LAT
IT'S ST EVERYTH PEACEFU TO BELIEVE REMEMBER- LIFE-- HAS HAPPENED LUCKY-- IF WORKS-- IT NEVE

Left: A moody as rendering, Asst. heavily influenced by Neal Adams, Sienkiewicz was beginning to push more experimental phase, with effects complements the psychodrama of Claremont's sto

Right: Flees st action and entr gstorytelling both l and edgy st fine

saw what was happening. You had from the way the characters were stanced to the way the scene was composed, a visual commentary or emphasis on the emotions of the moment and the characters as much as the physical details of the so-called reality."

TAKING A CHANCE

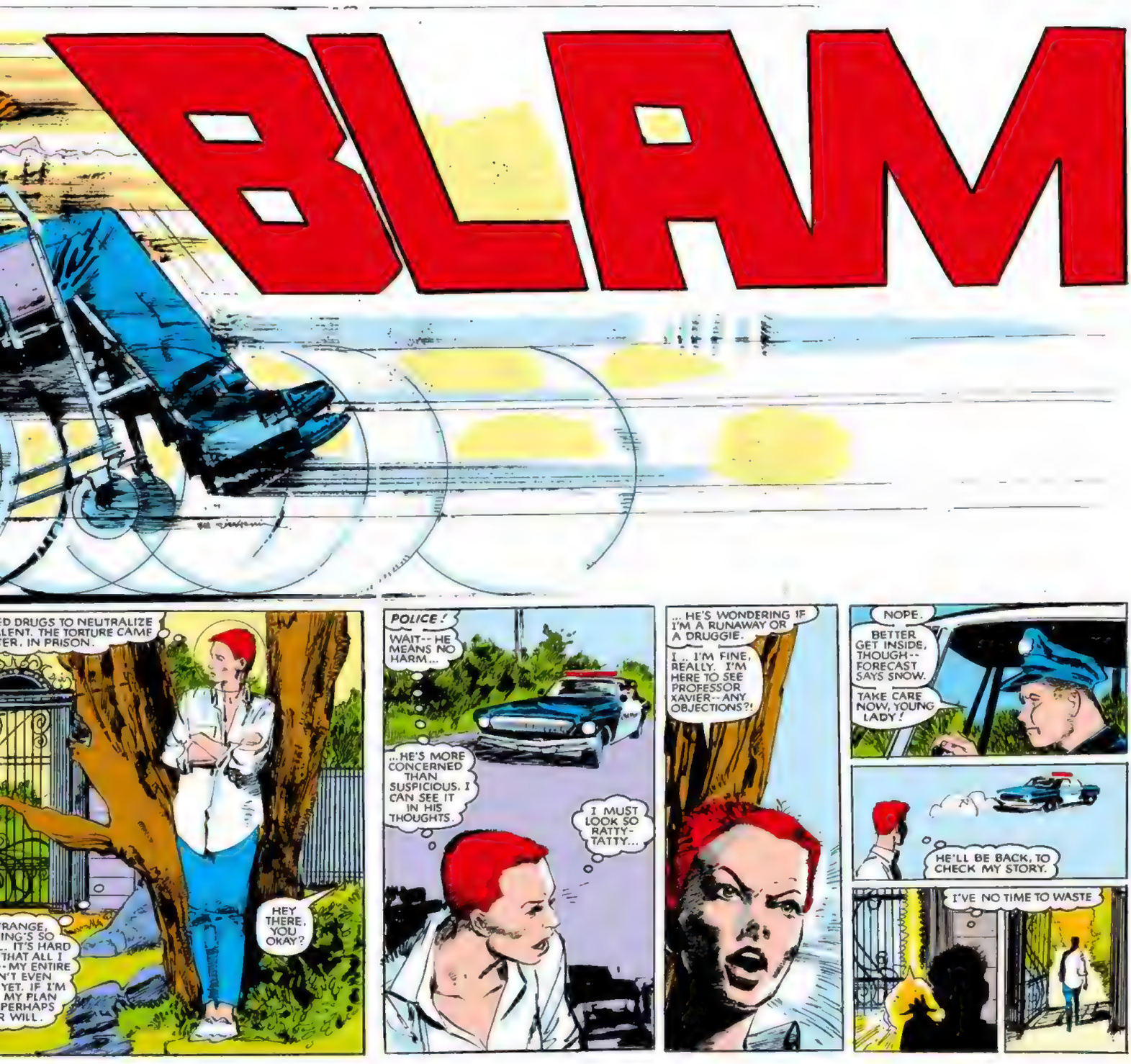
For his part, Sienkiewicz had just completed four years as the regular artist on *Moon Knight* and was not looking for another monthly gig when he visited the Marvel offices in the early part of 1984. Having recently pencilled a couple of issues of *Uncanny X-Men* culminating in 1982's *Uncanny X-Men Annual* #6, which pitted the mutants against Dracula himself, Sienkiewicz had just turned down the opportunity to become the new regular *Uncanny* series artist.

"I wasn't ready to jump into a full-blown series again after doing over 30 issues of *Moon Knight*, so I was looking for chances to jump around, and to feel a little less of the burden of the onslaught of a monthly," he recalls. "It was also too high-profile as well – after

> "I WASN'T AFTER A SERIES. I WANTED TO EXPERIMENT"

Moon Knight, I really wanted to experiment; I was getting into a lot of fine art books and animation, and I was also being influenced by writers like Hunter S. Thompson."

But when Claremont – who fortuitously also happened to be in the Marvel offices on that fateful day – pitched him "Demon Bear," which would become their opening storyline on *New Mutants*,


BLAM
ED DRUGS TO NEUTRALIZE
LENT. THE TORTURE CAME
ER. IN PRISON.
RANGE,
ING'S SO
... IT'S HARD
THAT ALL I
- MY ENTIRE
N'T EVEN
YET. IF I'M
MY PLAN
PERHAPS
R WILL.
HEY THERE, YOU OKAY?
POLICE!
WAIT-- HE MEANS NO HARM...
...HE'S MORE CONCERNED THAN SUSPICIOUS. I CAN SEE IT IN HIS THOUGHTS.
I MUST LOOK SO RATTY-TATTY...
... HE'S WONDERING IF I'M A RUNAWAY OR A DRUGGIE.
I .. I'M FINE, REALLY. I'M HERE TO SEE PROFESSOR XAVIER--ANY OBJECTIONS?!
NOPE.
BETTER GET INSIDE, THOUGH-- FORECAST SAYS SNOW.
TAKE CARE NOW, YOUNG LADY!
HE'LL BE BACK, TO CHECK MY STORY.
I'VE NO TIME TO WASTE

Sienkiewicz was instantly won over. "Within 30 seconds, I was like 'This sounds great!' and the deal was done right there and then. It was only three issues to start with, but it then turned into a series as after we were done with 'Demon Bear' we were having such a good time, that it was like 'Let's see what other madness we can unleash upon the public!'"

Claremont had planted seeds in previous issues for the Demon Bear saga, which pitted Cheyenne psychic Dani Moonstar, alias Mirage – "my viewpoint character for the series," he calls her – against a formidable supernatural entity that draws malevolent power from human emotion.

"Just as Frank Miller and I had done a lot of work building classical Japanese culture into the structure of the Wolverine mini-series we did together, I wanted to introduce Plains Native American culture into Dani's life and the New Mutants," he explains. "That's where having Bill as the artist was the perfect moment of synergy, because I didn't want it to be just a normal version of 'Here's a big monster bear.' Through the >

visual presentation, I wanted to make the reader aware that even though the New Mutants are the younger, more innocent team, they were not being ignored, as they were cool in their own way."

DANI'S NIGHTMARE

Taking inspiration from pioneering animators Tex Avery and Chuck Jones, Sienkiewicz reduced the Demon Bear to its primal basics. "Rather than doing a literal image of a bear, I wanted it to be the essence of a bear – which was sometimes just teeth, crazy googly eyes and claws," he says. "So it was almost like breaking it down into its respective attack parts, the bits that would do the most damage, and then just shrouding it in this black substance that was like some sort of ectoplasm. It was like playing around with implying fur but at the same time also implying that it was a hologram or some kind of spiritual thing because the whole thing was like Dani's nightmare, which was fine because I wasn't bound by bones and sinew but by dream logic."

Above: [illegible] covers gave away to even [illegible] especially in the depiction of the alien shapeshifter Warlock.
Below: Readers willing to go along to the ride found [illegible]

Subsequently, Sienkiewicz was determined to take a different approach to Legion, otherwise known as Professor X's long lost son David Haller, whose powerful psychic abilities are linked with his multiple personality disorder. "The one thing I didn't want to do was to recreate what I'd already done with the 'Demon Bear' saga, so it had to be a different kind of investment of going inside someone's head that wasn't like 'going into Dani's subconscious part two,'" he says.

I COULDN'T SAVE THE OTHERS—BUT I WON'T FAIL AMARA!
I'LL HAVE TO GAMBLE THAT SUMMONING MY SOUL[illegible] WON'T SERIOUSLY COMPLI[illegible] THE POWERS PROTECT- AND DANI.
AND MAKE SURE, AS WELL, THE BEAR DOESN'T HAVE A CHANCE TO FEET THEM!

He draws a comparison to Marc Spector's numerous identities in *Moon Knight*: "Even though it was a single character name in the title, it was really like a group book because at least four of the main characters were the one person. With Legion, I would like to have done more with the psychology of the individual characters and how they appeared to be facets of his personality. I look at them now and one of them was a mustachioed Clark Gable/Tom Selleck type, who was definitely a forerunner for Garrett in *Elektra: Assassin*."

From his debut in *New Mutants* #18, Sienkiewicz also highlighted the more malleable aspects of shapechanging alien Warlock. "When it came to Warlock, I'd seen *Alien* and had been talking about all kinds of different aliens," he says. "From an early age, I knew I wanted to draw comic books, so I

began studying anatomy by reading by mum's medical journals when I was in grammar school. I would study and learn about the muscles and where everything went. So I thought if I ever got to do a character that didn't have any anatomy, that you did not have to draw correctly, that was a character I could run with! In a way, he became more of a Rorschach test in terms of the way other artists interpreted him than the actual character of Rorschach."

Considering the lavish treatment now being afforded to his work in the Select Series volume, it's ironic that Sienkiewicz decided to quit *New Mutants* with #31 because he was disillusioned with the poor production values. "What really sealed the deal for me in terms of ending the run wasn't to do with working with Chris, although we were getting a little tired of the hectic pace we were on," he recalls. "What really did it for me was when we switched to flexi-printing, which used plastic plates, and I don't know what kind of inks they used but the saturation and the printing quality was just awful and wasn't doing us any favours in terms of subtlety. Not that the work I was doing was in any way subtle, but I was trying to get a darker tone with 'Demon Bear', so I wanted there to be an ominous quality to some of it. But with flexigraphic printing, everything was so garish and bright, and it was just like assaulting the eye, so I had to get away from that."

However, Sienkiewicz learnt some important lessons that he'd later apply in his collaborations with Frank Miller, the Epic series *Elektra: Assassin* and the Kingpin-centred Daredevil graphic novel *Love and War*, both of which were published in 1986. "I decided that I would take what I was doing on *New Mutants* style-wise and transfer it to painting," he says. "So I decided that the next step for me was not just to do cover paintings but also interior artwork that was painted. I just wanted another avenue to explore and expand out on what was possible visually."

> **"A CHARACTER WITH NO ANATOMY? THAT I COULD RUN WITH!"**

NEW MUTANTS ON THE BIG SCREEN

With the box office success of *Deadpool* and *X-Men: Apocalypse*, 20th Century-Fox's cinematic X-world is set to expand even further, with *The Fault In Our Stars* director Josh Boone currently developing a New Mutants film and *Game of Thrones*' Maisie Williams being tipped to star as Scottish mutant werewolf Rahne "Wolfsbane" Sinclair. "There's also rumours that Sophie Turner, who was Jean Grey in *X-Men: Apocalypse*, wants to be in the film as well, so who knows, it could be a New Mutants gathering of Westeros," laughs Chris Claremont, who believes that his and Bill Sienkiewicz's opening three-parter is the obvious choice for the main plotline. "If I were looking to make a film based on a concept that was both exciting and visually challenging as source material, as well as a heck of a good story, then I would go with 'Demon Bear'..."

New Mutants: Bill Sienkiewicz Marvel Artist Select Series is published by IDW Publishing this month

JOYEUX NOËL pour andy gang

LE ROI DE LA BAVURE

CHANTAL MONTELLIER

LES HUMANOIDES ASSOCIES

WORLD OF Comics

CHANTAL MONTELLIER

A Woman of Images

An artist of supreme versatility known for drawing cold, dystopian cities and the damaged souls that live there, ***Paul Gravett*** talks to the incomparable Chantal Montellier

Chantal Montellier is a true rarity, and not just in French bandes dessinées. She brings strong principles, political and personal, left-wing and feminist, to her work and her life, as well as an uncompromising clarity and impact to her engaged and engaging narratives. An innovator since the '70s, she was a pioneering creator in tackling dystopian sci-fi and darkly topical tales of criminals and cops, genres seldom handled by women creators. The Paris-based pioneer looks back at more than four decades on the frontlines of the medium.

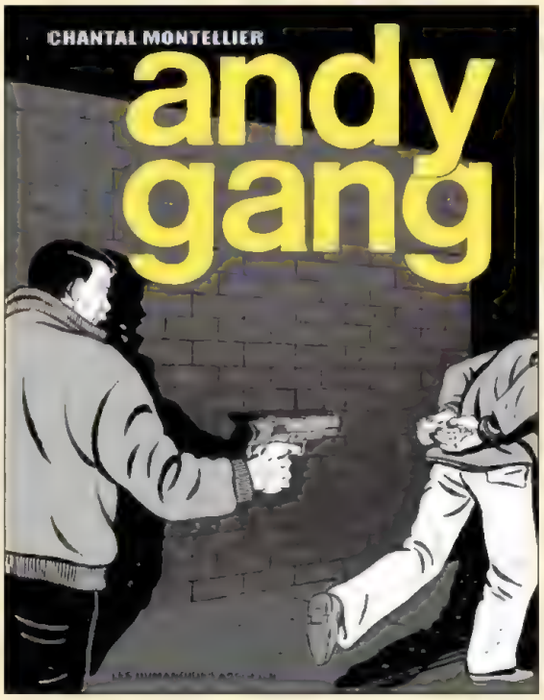
COMIC HEROES: How did your childhood influence your life and principles?

CHANTAL MONTELLIER: My childhood was affected a lot by my mother's epilepsy, caused by an abortion too late in her pregnancy and the overly strong anaesthetic she was given for it. Due to her frequent, violent attacks, she couldn't look after me, so my maternal grandmother took over. My father put in minimal appearances until I turned 15, then left, abandoning me in a perilous situation. Luckily, my maternal uncle and aunt and other local people also looked after me. Their support helped me to live. My drawings were put on the walls of all these families' homes, so I felt at home there. The human family replaced the private family. My mother remains for me a tale of suffering. She tried many times to commit suicide and almost succeeded. This "tragic" dimension is very present in my work.

CH: What does drawing give you?

CM: As a child, an escape, a protection, an antidote. It was a ordeal for me to look at my mother's visible suffering. Drawing let me escape and sublimate it... I also had my eyes fixed on escapist images in books and albums, children's magazines, and my own drawings. I filled whole sketchbooks and even went into business with them, exchanging drawings for homework, especially maths.

My talent led me to study Fine Arts at Saint-Etienne, the first art school in France. I



"France's first politically engaged woman cartoonist"

felt at home there and got excellent results, though I didn't join in a lot with the other students. I was considered an "ugly duckling" and already subtly ostracised. The fact that I often came top of the class did not sit well with them. I was not all that sociable, deliberately.

As an adult, it seemed obvious that I would live an artist's life. I clearly needed psychiatric help, but that was only for "mad" people in the '60s and I wasn't considered to be like that. The suffering I had endured and not spoken about started to well up in the art I made. My images let me hit out for being misunderstood and rejected by others. As well as being therapeutic, drawing and painting restored balance and gave me a release otherwise thwarted by society.

CH: Why did you abandon painting to pursue political cartooning and illustration?

CM: I had to earn my living and that wasn't possible with painting. Teaching art, I didn't have time, energy and desire to create. I broke away from this demanding job thanks to another teacher, Aimé Marcellan, who in 1971 proposed that I draw for *Combat syndicaliste*, a trade union magazine he also managed. People liked my drawings and I thought it would be more agreeable to earn my living this way than by teaching. We're in the early '70s and there were lots of independent publications; I took my chances with some and it worked. So unconsciously, I became France's first politically "engaged" woman cartoonist. And almost right away I began to get complaints... A woman's viewpoint and images in this field were disturbing and I had no one on my side.

Above: Pages from the gritty crime comic, *Andy Gang*.

CH: How did you come to make the transition from political cartoons to comics?

CM: I was drawing in several left-wing and extreme -eft periodicals and getting quite visible. Comics were flourishing and new magazines were appearing, often set up by creators, like *Métal Hurlant*

by Jean-Pierre Dionnet, Moebius and Philippe Druillet. I believe it was following a stay in Paris by American underground comix artist Trina Robbins, hosted by Dionnet and his wife Janic Grillerez-Dionnet, that the idea emerged of giving *Métal Hurlant* a little sister. Jean-Pierre may not have been all that keen on it, but the women won and *Ah! Nana* was born in 1976.

CH: What appealed to you about *Ah! Nana*?

CM: The female focus of *Ah! Nana* attracted me, also because the talented Nicole Claveloux (who came from the same school as me) had agreed to appear in it. I started regularly publishing comics in *Ah! Nana* commissioned by Janic and Anne Delobel, the publishers' editorial secretary, who "recruited" me. At the time Anne was Jacques Tardi's companion and the inspiration for his new character Adèle Blanc Sec. And *Ah! Nana* was international, so Cécilia Capuana represented Italy, Trina Robbins the USA, Liz Bijl (like me a former assistant to Guy Peellaert) the Netherlands, etc. The milieu of French comics had nothing to do with the political press, where I felt much more at ease and which has all but disappeared or "normalised" today. I could have conversations with political journalists there, which I couldn't have with comics artists, and that frustrated me. In the specialist press there was also an egotism and narcissism which distanced me, not to mention the pent-up sexism and macho attitudes which persist today.

CH: From its third issue, *Ah! Nana* added themed sections whose later risqué content prompted official censorship.

Above: Métal Hurlant – the legendary comics magazine that played host to work by Montellier, Moebius and many more creators

GOOD!... DO YOU STILL FEEL WE WERE WRONG TO MAKE YOU SUBMIT TO THIS OPERA-TION?
OH!... N... NO... S... S... SIR... I DON'T THINK THAT NO MO... MORE...
GOOD... YOU'RE FINE!... HOLD ON TO YOUR RELEASE SLIP... YOU ARE NOW READY TO FIND YOUR PLACE IN SOCIETY...
NEXT!
WHARE YU GOWIN? LEEYIN?
YES... I I HAVE... MY... SLIP!...
LEE MEEYULONE! YU GOD NO RIDE!
AWRIDE! SHADDAB!
HEAVY METAL 85

After nine issues, why did *Ah! Nana* finally close in 1978?

CM: Janic has told me several times that *Ah! Nana* sold better than *Métal*, but I doubt that. One thing is sure, the magazine was hit hard by the censorship commission, though Janic never says the same thing as to what lay behind it. The prohibition on displaying the magazine on the newsstands was like a death sentence. Once the magazine became invisible, it stopped selling. The covers were a bit provocative, but no more than those on *Métal* or others, so why was the women's title hit? I've never really understood properly.

CH: What was it that inspired Andy Gang, your crime series in *Ah! Nana*, which later appeared in English in *Heavy Metal*?

CM: This series was on the theme of police blunders and abuses of power, which featured a lot in the news then. We were under the reign of Giscard d'Estaing [French president 1974-1981] and numerous instances of this sort were being covered up. One character, brigadier Marchaudon, was a specialist at these abuses and inspired a film in which he was played by Coluche, a popular comedian, who died in a suspicious accident.

CH: When you switched to *Métal Hurlant*, what sparked your interest in trying science fiction with *1996*?

CM: *1996* came from the visual shocks I felt watching certain American films like *THX 1138*,

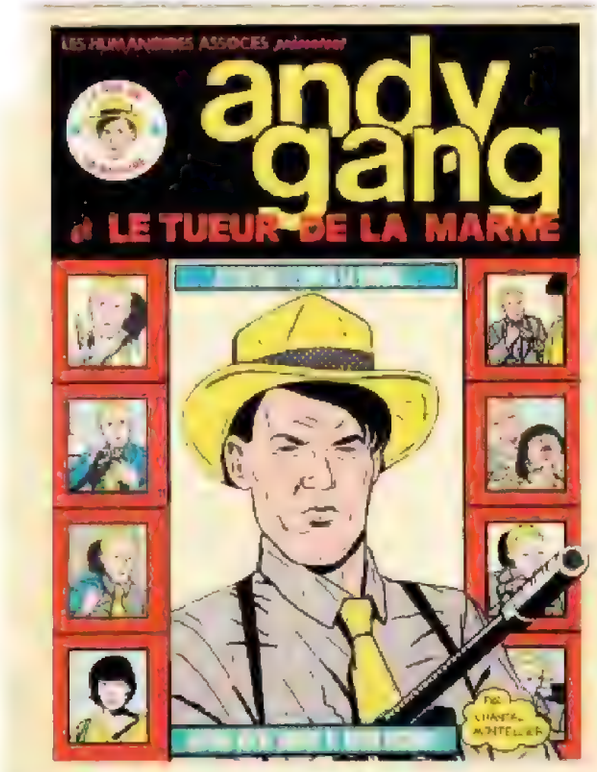
Taxi Driver, Escape From New York and *Blade Runner*. An impression of chaos and the collapse of civilisation, of the degraded, depraved concrete jungle. Something irredeemably ferocious, cruel, crass, violent and perverted. A city of lizards for lizards. I had the same impressions when I visited New York in the '80s. New York is very visible in my dystopian graphic novels, demonstrating the negative model of American society, as a way of saying to the public, "Don't go, don't dream of it, switch to something else. Change your dream!" France has nothing to gain by identifying itself with it and wanting to become American.

CH: How did your collaborations with *Métal Hurlant* work out?
CM: I always felt totally free to relate and draw what I wanted. Actually, I wonder whether those responsible were reading what I made for them. There was a certain laxity. What went less well was the payment for creators' rights. One of my graphic novels, *Shelter*, was honoured on *Apostrophes*, a television show [on literature] followed by millions of viewers. The album sold very well, it was reprinted, but I was not told anything and never saw how the royalties worked out. No expense was spared for the owners of the business, while I could scarcely afford my rent.

CH: Can you explain your drawing process?
CM: For my early political drawings, I used press photos and an epidiascope which let me project the photos onto my sheet of Canson paper and easily make blow-ups or reductions, which saved me from making preparatory sketches. As I had to work fast, it was practical because I saved lots of time. I used a Rotring pen and my style became more photographic as well as more "surgical", as some critics said. I would call it more cold, objective, analytical. I was dissecting.

CH: What was your reaction when critics Bruno Lecigne and Jean-Pierre Taminé identified your work in 1983 as part of a wave of "Nouveau Réalisme" in French comics?
CM: I believe that May 1968, by pushing the working class and the working world to the front of the stage, brought some social and political reality. Some artists including me could not remain insensitive to this. I have a weakness for a certain realism, sometimes political and social, sometimes poetic, sometimes fantastic. Abstract art mostly bored me. I need Body, Figure, whether in the style of Bacon or Caravaggio, Picasso or Bosch...

CH: After *1996*, you created *Wonder City* and *Shelter*, which form a kind of dystopian trilogy. Did you read science fiction?
CM: Like almost everyone I have read or watched Orwell's *1984*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Boulle's *Planet Of The Apes*, Lang's *Metropolis*, Boorman's *Zardoz*, Gilliam's *Brazil*. I do not read contemporary science fiction, because my interest leans now more towards politics and what economists and critical philosophers say and write about the present day. What we are forced to live today seems like a social narrative fiction – we are living in Orwell and Huxley. "The future is now," to quote a piece of graffiti in *Wonder City*. My favourite writers are filmmakers. I am first and foremost a woman of images, and the images of Andrei Tarkovsky marked me forever, whether his more realistic movies like *Andrei Rublev* or the enigmatic visions of *Stalker*. To me, after Tarkovsky, all the images I see seem more or less adulterated.



Above: More from Andy Gang. The series began life in *Ah! Nana*, a spinoff from Métal Hurlant

CH: You've used both *faits divers* or short news reports in your book Blues and major stories like the Paris shoot-out by Florence Rey and Audry Maupin, or the disaster at Chernobyl, in your graphic novels. What makes documentary and reportage ideal approaches to comics, perhaps better than typical mass-media coverage?
CM: The work of real journalists is obviously very useful to me to develop my "docudramas". I don't feel like a journalist, more an artist-witness to her times. The purely journalistic treatment of *faits divers* reduces them to their simplest form, whereas some are truly a revealing mirror of society and deserve better treatment. And the Rey-Maupin affair in 1994 went far beyond those two manipulated young people to involve the workings of politicians and police in '90s French society. It led to the Assemblée voting in extensive "security and freedom" measures – video cameras everywhere, stronger

Left: People and cities – recurrent images throughout Chantal Montellier's work

social checks, searches without warrants, a much-increased police budget. You might say that our society was changed thanks to the sacrifice of those two black sheep.

CH: Kafka is another influence. What does he mean to you?
CM: I fell into Kafka when I was little through *Metamorphosis*. I was living like a female double of Gregor Samsa, under my father's gaze transformed into an insect. I read and re-read *Letter To His Father* and have often dreamed that my father killed me. Kafka is like my brother, there's a closeness between us, a slightly paranoid vision of the world.

CH: How did you adapt *The Trial* by Kafka into the graphic novel, published by SelfMadeHero?
CM: I contented myself to best serve the adaptation made by David Zane Mairowitz, a specialist in the author from Prague. I also used images from the extraordinary film by Orson Welles, in which Anthony Perkins plays Josef K. He is the perfect actor for this role.

CH: How have you used the autobiography in your work?
CM: Directly or indirectly. In early 2015, my album *La Reconstitution Vol. 1* covers from 1947, the date of my appearance on this earth, to the early 1980s. I revisit both my personal history and the histories of the women cartoonists of my generation (*Ah! Nana* appears there, naturally). This book came out at the time of the Charlie Hebdo massacre and disappeared into the bloodbath, so the publishers decided to kill the second volume, which is almost finished. Currently, I am also working on a new version of *Shelter* for Les Impressions Nouvelles and other illustrated books.

CH: How far have women making comics progressed in France since the 1970s?
CM: There are more and more women creating graphic novels. Every year since the Artémisia prize for best French graphic novel by a woman was first awarded in 2008, the jury examines 100 and shortlists around 15. Women lag behind in this field, however, and even their best productions often lack confidence, strength, boldness; but it's progressing. The problem lies mainly in terms of recognition. Florence Cestac is the only woman to win the Grand Prix in 45 years of the Angoulême International Comics Festival!

CH: Considering the scandalous absence of any women nominees for this year's Angoulême Grand Prix, how should the Festival respond?
CM: Recognise those omissions and revisit comics history honestly. Put talent, hard work, quality of work back at the centre of it all. Take into account how women historically have been disfavoured by patriarchal society in the field of artistic creation. Repair, recognise, value, understand and, above all, respect. The problem runs much deeper than comics. We are still living on the "Planet of the Apes" and, at the rate things are going, we're not ready to truly harmonise.

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The next dozen pages are crammed with reviews of the latest comics and graphic novels...

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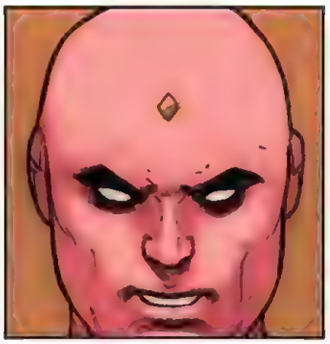
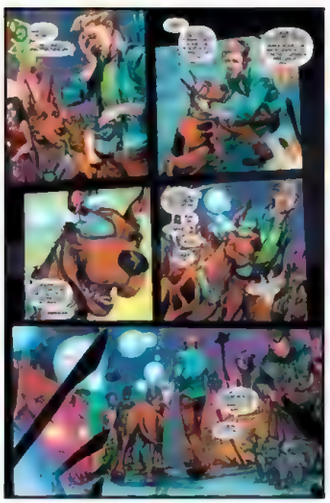




Aquaman returns to his classic Silver Age look.

Where does he get all those wonderful toys?

DC Rebirth roundup

DC's *Rebirth* was greeted with a certain amount of cynicism by fans when it was announced, with questions lighting up forum boards. Why was DC relaunching again so swiftly after 2011's New 52 reboot took every key character back to #1? How would Batman, Superman and the rest be rebranded this time?

But one thing was clear: with DC's sales at their lowest for decades, the reboot had to work. And with pre-release leaks giving away key twists that seemed insane out of context, the signs didn't look good.

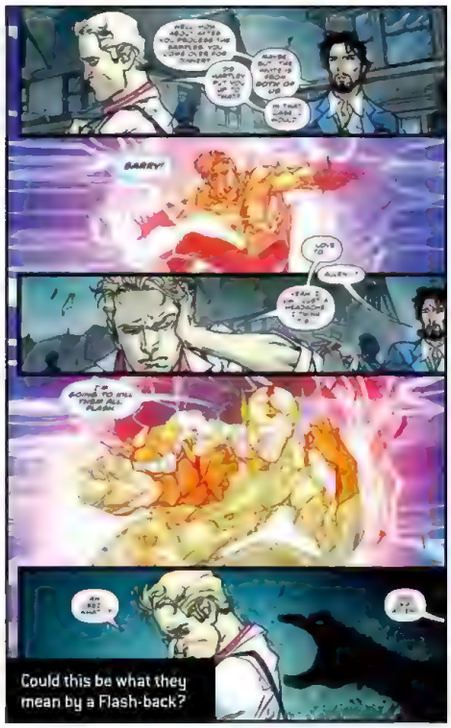
Then Geoff Johns' *DC Universe: Rebirth* #1 hit the shelves, and fans' worries vanished faster than Superman's pants from his 2011 costume. As Johns' story unfolded, it became clear that this wasn't a reboot, or even a retcon; it was a return – a return to DC's multiverse concept, a genius adjustment that repositions The New 52 as one of several potential universes. This allowed the company to bring back the most valuable asset it lost in 2011 – its history. The special follows pre-Flashpoint Wally West (absent from the New 52 timeline) as he attempts to break back into continuity, before he vanishes forever. It's half love letter, half apology note – with Johns openly admitting where his beloved DC has gone wrong in recent years, explaining clearly how they intend to put things right. It's a genius premise, and if you don't get goosebumps before the end, you're probably Gorilla Grodd.

> "NOT A REBOOT OR EVEN A RETCON BUT A RETURN TO GLORY"

Fast track back

The special's storyline is expanded in *The Flash: Rebirth*, the first comic you should read after Johns' masterpiece, mainly because it's a direct sequel, flowing directly from that issue's events. Like the comic that came before it, it's a nostalgic return to DC's glory days, with writer Joshua Williamson taking Johns' baton and running with it, via '80s anime-influenced art, creating an engaging story that will be as recognisable to Flash TV show fans as to folks who collected the character in the Silver Age.

Which isn't to say Rebirth is completely stuck in the past. *Batman: Rebirth* might take Bruce Wayne back to his roots, but there's plenty of new additions to the mythology, not least in a radically fresh approach to his sidekick's



Could this be what they mean by a Flash-back?

Wally West is a catalyst for the events of Rebirth.

Greg Rucka plays with our awareness of WW history.

branding and a dark new twist on a classic villain. Tom King is one of the most respected writers in comics, with his work on Marvel's *Vision* and DC's own *The Omega Men* lauded by critics and fans alike (even if those titles' sales figures don't necessarily reflect their quality). Following Scott Snyder on *Batman* was always going to be tough, but King lays some clever groundwork here

Not all wet

Aquaman: Rebirth is less successful, using too many pages to argue how awesome the character is, self-consciously fighting the popular misconception (brought into the mainstream by the HBO show *Entourage*, where he was a near-constant punchline) that Aquaman is lame. The only problem is, if we've bought an Aquaman comic, chances are we already think he's pretty cool. The art's as inconsistent as the storytelling and, while we admire the return to Arthur and Mera's classic looks, the characterisation varies wildly from page to page. Still, there is certainly fun stuff here – with weapon-equipped sea-beasts and underwater-terrorists pointing towards a challenging future for King Arthur and his sea-pals.

Wonder Woman: Rebirth weaves a different common fan complaint – that the character's backstory is muddled and confusing – into a clever existential crisis for her, resulting in a very rewarding read. Greg Rucka uses his previous Diana experience to deconstruct her history, presenting the recent New 52 changes as potential lies, sending her on a mission to find herself.

Cleverly incorporating each version of Wonder Woman's origins, Rucka allows room to include elements from Brian Azzarello and Cliff Chiang's run (easily the highlight of the entire New 52 enterprise) while introducing his own take on the mythos. *Wonder Woman* should be used as an example to all DC teams to demonstrate how the Rebirth project should work: it weaves together the greatest elements of the character, with no apparent limits on how Diana's rich legacy can be used. If that approach can be applied across the line, then DC's fortunes could indeed be born again. **Sam Ashurst**

Writer: Geoff Johns
Artist: Various
Colourist: Various
Format: One-shot
★★★★★

Writer: Joshua Williamson
Artist: Carmine Di Giandomenico
Colourist: Ivan Plascencia
Format: One-shot
★★★★★

Writers: Scott Snyder, Tom King
Artist: Mikel Janín
Colourist: June Cheung
Format: One-shot
★★★★

Writer: Dan Abnett
Artists: Scot Eaton, Oscar Jiménez & Mark Morales
Colourist: Gabe Eltaeb
Format: One-shot
★★★

Writer: Greg Rucka
Artists: Various
Colourist: Various
Format: One-shot
★★★★★

What's a crossover without an epic confrontation or two?

Civil War II

Earth 616 may still be feeling the effects of *Secret Wars*, but another summer means another Marvel crossover event (or two or three... **narrows eyes at the X-Men) as everything changes again with *Civil War II*.**

Much like the previous *Civil War* crossover (not to mention the recent Captain America movie), *Civil War II* sees two opposing factions of superheroes locking horns over a larger philosophical issue. A new Inhuman called Ulysses has been discovered with the ability to "accurately" predict the future. The dilemma becomes whether or not to take proactive advantage of this. On one side is Captain Marvel, Carol Danvers, who hopes to use Ulysses to stop crimes before they happen. On the other side is Tony Stark, who believes that giving in to pre-crime would lead to wider ethical issues that the Avengers would rather not get into.

Taking a conceit from *Minority Report* and applying it to the world of capes and criminals is an inspired decision. *Civil War II* has a very well developed narrative point which all the characters can work from. Based on their previous histories it's apparent which heroes would fall in favour of pre-crime or against it, allowing Brian Michael Bendis to draw believable lines in the sand between the different factions without much irrational or arbitrary escalation.

> "THE PROMISED DEATH OF A HERO OCCURS WITH ALARMING SPEED"

It's rare to see a Marvel crossover that can afford to put a cosmic level attack and an appearance from Thanos in its background, but *Civil War II*'s battles have more troubling preoccupations, conflicts more personal and more philosophical as a roster of Marvel superheroes racked with guilt over previous "hero vs. hero" efforts try their best to not give in to fisticuffs. At one part Tony Stark directly references the original *Civil War* book, remarking to Steve Rogers that he'd like to avoid any morality debates. Bendis strains to make sure this war is not a battle that our heroes want to fight. Not yet, at least.

That's not to say that *Civil War II*'s opening act is a quiet one... Marvel writers promised the death of a hero prior to the book's debut, and the speed with which it occurs is alarming. The repercussions of *Civil War II* will reverberate throughout the Avengers, the Ultimates and the Inhumans. Readers would be well advised to try to hunt down the #0 that was given away as part of Free Comic Book Day, as it includes important story beats that make Act I's story much more cohesive.

Choice artist

That the main book is drawn by the superb David Marquez underlines Marvel's positioning of *Civil War II* as a blockbuster in comic form. Marquez's clear, clean lines lend themselves well to *Civil War II*'s "widescreen" action scenes. In the space of three years Marquez has become one of Marvel's most trusted

You know times are hard when you can't even get a quiet drink.

Spider-Man encounters the Vulturions over the city.

artists and it is clear to see why. There's a real sense of forward momentum to the book.

Of course where there are crossovers, there are tie-in books. Marvel's summer events tend to go one of two ways with their tie-ins: either they are left to do the character work while the main books deal with action and spectacle, or they allow themselves creative riffs on themes central to the main book. *Civil War II*'s opening tie-ins seem to fall in the later camp as both Peter Parker's Spider-Man and Hercules try to reconcile the idea of knowing the path that lies ahead with whether they should walk it.

The Spider-Man book stumbles, however, as far too much time is spent on needless exposition instead of letting us see Spider-Man talk and connect with Ulysses. On top of this, Christos Gage's Spider-Man isn't particularly compelling to begin with – his Peter Parker is too broadly written, possessing none of the life and spark that makes Bendis and Dan Slott's takes on the character so much fun. The fact that the book's cliffhanger teases one great reveal and swaps it for a wholly ordinary one instead only adds to the disappointment.

But where *Spider-Man* disappoints, *Gods of War* thrives, as frequent Hercules writer Dan Abnett adds *Civil War II*'s themes of causality and destiny into a story fit for a god who's fallen on hard times. Here we find the son of Zeus humbled and isolated as he wages war with "new" gods of technology and avarice. *Gods of War* is not a necessary read for *Civil War II*, but it is a fun one.

This new crossover comes at an interesting time for Marvel. *Civil War II* feels like an attempt to be both a sequel to the Mark Millar-penned original and an easy jumping-on point for cinema-goers who want more superhero vs. superhero shenanigans. Its opening act is ambitious and not entirely successful, but if Bendis and Marquez can keep the right plates spinning, we might have a new event deserving of the name. **Carl Anka**

Writer: Brian M. Bendis
Artist: David Marquez
Colourist: Justin Ponsor
Format: 8-issue series
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★★½

Writer: Christos Gage
Artist: Travel Foreman
Colourist: Rain Beredo
Format: 4-issue series
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★

Writer: Dan Abnett
Artist: Emilio Laiso
Colourist: Guru eFX
Format: 4-issue series
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★½

Patience

Writer: Daniel Clowes
Artist: Daniel Clowes
Publisher: Jonathan Cape
Format: Graphic novel

★★★★½

What if they remade *Back to the Future* and left out all the jokes? You might end up with something like *Patience*.

The story begins with a happy event: a newly married couple discovering they're pregnant. But this is Daniel Clowes, comics' very own bard of despair and self-loathing, so you know things are destined to take a turn for the worse. Sure enough, Jack, the father-to-be, comes home one day to find the mother of his unborn child dead on the living-room floor, a murder victim. At first the police have Jack pegged as the suspect, but eventually he is released and vows he will track down the true culprit.

This is where *Patience* gets surprising, as the narrative abruptly jets forward 17 years into the near future. An older but no less miserable Jack is still obsessing about his wife's death. He discovers a method of travelling back in time and sets off into the past to see if he can rectify what has gone wrong.

The more Jack interferes with the timeline, however, the more tangled events become and the looser his grip on reality grows – a Möbius strip of trippy anxiety. Word balloons leak off the panel edges, as if words themselves are coming adrift, and Clowes stretches himself (and our sanity) with some spectacular Ditkoesque weirdscape imagery. The result is a tightly and cunningly plotted piece of grown-up SF about moral dilemmas and existential crises... and not a flux capacitor in sight. **James Lovegrove**

Clandestino

Reviewed: Issues 1-3
Writer: Amancay Nahuelpan
Artist: Amancay Nahuelpan
Publisher: Black Mask
Format: 6-part series

★★★★½

Created, written, illustrated and lettered by *Young Terrorists'* artist Amancay Nahuelpan, *Clandestino* is the story of a bad man in a bad country.

General Kapala has taken over Tairona and while guerrilla organisations have formed to oppose him, they lack a leader. Enter Clandestino...

Nahuelpan's story is a clear paean to old-school, bloody-knuckled action movies. You can almost see the film scratch and jump on some of the burly but deceptively careful action sequences. There's the same energy, the same brutality and the same focus on one bad man, doing bad things for good reasons.

If that was all there was to it then *Clandestino* would be fun but ultimately disposable. But stick with it. Clandestino may be a one-man wrecking crew but he's fiercely loyal to the rebels who raised him. Leena, the love of his life, may initially look like she's wandered in from a Michael Bay movie, but she has agency all of her own.

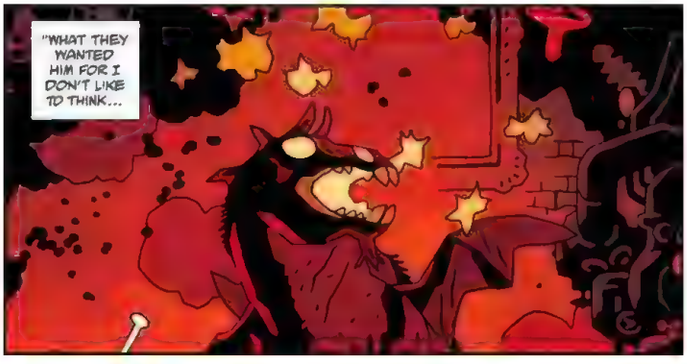
Best of all, under the growls and blood there's joy at getting to cut loose. An early action scene uses the shape of Clandestino's gun as panels. A later one is a rooftop chase between Citroen 2CVs and a muscle car. The absurd sits side-by-side with the macho and they make each other look *good*.

Clandestino is a glowering muscle car of a book. But look under the hood and you'll be surprised by how smart it is. **Alasdair Stuart**

...AND HOPE SHE'S STILL ALIVE.
D'O YOU KNOW WHOM WOULD BE THE...
WTF
KOTAM BASE CAMP.
LOCATION: LONGITUDE: -95.677068, LATITUDE: 37.0625
OK. THIS IS BAD. THIS IS FUCKING BAD!
THEY BURNT THE WHOLE CAMP. BUT IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE -COUGH- LIKE THEY TOUCHED THE BUNKER...
IT LOOKS CLEAN.
NO SCRATCHES
Not just a Van Damme movie in comics...

EDWARD GRAY
THAT YOU HAVE DENIED ME GREEN FIELDS TO BURN, OCEANS TO BOIL...
"HE CURSED ME THAT I SHOULD LIVE FOREVER
"...THEN TORE ME TO PIECES
"...AND LEFT ME TO FALL ON BLOOD ALONE THE BANKS OF THE ACHERON."
ACHERON

Nobody draws Hellboy — or Hell — like Mignola.
HELLBOY
YEAH, WE DON'T WANT THAT
SO WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR ME?
"DO-? THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO
NO. QUITE BEYOND US, I'M AFRAID
BUT WE DO KNOW A FELLOW. WEIRDY. GOOD MUCH MORE HIS SORT OF THING



Hellboy In Hell

Reviewed: Issues 1-10
Writer: Mike Mignola
Artist: Mike Mignola
Publisher: Dark Horse
Format: 10-issue series

★★★★

So Hellboy's long, strange journey through the Underworld comes to an end, and with it goes our last chance to see Mike Mignola illustrate as well as write the character (probably).

After ten issues *Hellboy in Hell* delivers a swansong that's melancholy and valedictory, our hero finally, resignedly accepting a destiny which he has been unable to avoid even in death.

The afterlife has obliged Hellboy to deal with various vengeful family members, along with other enemies both old and new, including a spiritual parasite slowly leeching the soul from him. Now Hell is his for the taking, or the harrowing if he so chooses. But the Inferno is all about circles – isn't it, Dante? – so the conclusion sees an older, wiser figure returning to where he started. Bruised, battered and minus an eye but still master of a sardonic quip and a good left hook, Hellboy can reflect on how he has changed and what he has lost and gained in the process.

The narrative has unfurled at a meandering pace, with Mignola merrily indulging himself by drawing all the things we know he likes to draw: corpses, crumbling medieval European buildings, statues, demons, huge angular blocks of black ink. Hell, here, is an empty, shadowy place where the dead drift aimlessly and the rules are Kafkaesque and inexplicable. As ever, the storytelling is wayward and difficult to predict, and that is its beauty. You have no idea where Mignola is going to go; like Hellboy, you simply accept that what will be, must be.

James Lovegrove

"MIGNOLA INDULGES HIMSELF BY DRAWING ALL HE LIKES TO DRAW"

HOW'S THAT SAVING GO AGAIN?
WELL, LOOK!T THIS, ROY--IT'S OUR FAVORITE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OFFICER.
SHE'S NOT MY FAVORITE. I LIKE THAT GUY THAT WATCHES BONES. WE BOOGIE OVER THAT SHIT.
EITHER WAY, GOOD TO SEE YOU, LIEUTENANT MALONE.
BOYS, I TOLD YOU YOU CAN CALL ME SHERYL.
JUST BECAUSE I'M IN I.A. DOESN'T MEAN WE NEED TO HAVE AN [redacted] RELATIONSHIP.
A LITTLE CLICHÉ FOR MY TASTES--
FOR INSTANCE, WHEN I WENT LOOKING FOR YOU, I KNEW TO SHOW UP HERE, AT AN ILLEGAL BETTING ESTABLISHMENT--
BUT YOU DON'T SEE ME WRITING ANY REPORTS, DO YOU?
NOW, THIS, ON THE OTHER HAND--
Miami Vice with the conmen from Hustle?
YOU FELLAS KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT "THIS" ARMED ROBBERY AT A SENIOR CENTER THIS AFTERNOON?
MIGHT BE WORTH MY TIME

The Fix

Writer: Nick Spencer
Artist: Steve Lieber
Colourist: Ryan Hill
Publisher: Image
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-3

★★★★½

Remember *The Shield*? No, not the patriotic superhero, the TV show with Michael Chiklis. It was brilliant. For seven seasons we followed the adventures of Vic Mackey as his team of corrupt cops bent the law way past breaking point.

The Fix is, essentially, *The Shield* played for dark laughs. The story follows Roy and Mac – two crooks who realise that the best way to get ahead as criminals is to have day jobs as cops. Gleefully unrepentant, they use this cover to con and steal their way through life. Their actions haven't gone unnoticed, however, and they owe money to some very bad people...

Nick Spencer's script walks the fine line of making Roy and Mac entertaining company – thanks to superb, snappy dialogue – while never justifying their actions. And compared to the likes of cheerful criminal mastermind Josh (interests: bluegrass music, social justice, and setting people on fire), they're practically innocents.

Steve Lieber's clean art belies the books' darker moments – which includes the stomach-churning fitting up of an innocent man. Sticking largely to a 4x4 grid, it brings a cheerful sense of pace and movement to the book that fits well with the absurdist tone. It's aided by Ryan Hill's smooth, Californian colours. The book feels warm and sunny, but it casts long shadows.

The Fix is a world away from realistic crime comics, or their sad-eyed Image stablemate *The Violent*. For the moment at least, it's a fast and funny caper – but one, you suspect, that'll rapidly take a darker turn. **Will Salmon**

The Vision

Writer: Tom King
Artist: Gabriel Hernandez Walta
Colourist: Jordie Bellaire
Publisher: Marvel
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-6

★★★★

Marvel's friendly neighbourhood synthezoid has never exactly been its most compelling character. He's the Pinocchio at the back of the Avengers line-up – lovable but largely one-note.

Which is why this new series is such a surprise and a delight. Vision has built himself a ready-made family – wife Virginia and twin teenage children Viv and Vin – and moved to the suburbs. While he goes to work for the President, his family are left to struggle with fitting in with normal life, even though they've barely begun to grasp what it means to be alive.

Across the first six-issue arc, a series of escalating incidents leave villains and townspeople (and pets) dead, with Vision just starting to realise that his family are to blame – albeit accidentally.

King's take on the nuclear family in suburbia is darkly funny and deeply poignant and raises big questions about what it means to be human. It also draws obvious – but not overbearing – parallels with racism and other forms of bigotry as the Visions find themselves barred from society for their differences.

Walta's Vision family – with their wide, blank, inhuman eyes – are heartrendingly expressive and vulnerable, and the genuine fear and lack of understanding on the faces of the human characters keep things nicely morally grey. No-one is to blame for what happens here, except possibly the Vision, who's clearly made a big mistake in creating his family, and now all manner of trouble is heading his way. **Abigail Chandler**

THAT'S NOT YOUR DECISION TO MAKE.
I AM THE VISION OF THE AVENGERS. I HAVE SAVED THIS PLANET THIRTY-SEVEN TIMES.
EACH DAY YOU LIVE. EACH BREATH YOU TAKE. EACH BEAT OF YOUR HEART.
The superheroing is the easy part of the job...

How To Talk To Girls At Parties

Writer: Neil Gaiman
Artists: Fábio Moon and Gabriel Bá
Publisher: Dark Horse
Format: Graphic novel

★★★

Adapting a prose work into graphic form is a tricky business. It's important to retain as much of the original's flavour as possible while making the end result read as though it was meant to be a comic. Brazilian twin brothers Moon and Bá have done a creditable job striking that balance with this version of a Neil Gaiman short story first published in his 2006 collection *Fragile Things*. Their loose, lush artwork is a treat – every element of every panel seems to be in motion, and watercolour washes add delicacy and drama.

The tale itself is whisper-slight and inconclusive. Teenage buddies Enn and Vic go to a party where the girls are as lovely as they are weird. Vic is a super-confident stud, who offers the much shyer Enn handy tips for dealing with them. "They're just girls," he says. "They don't come from another planet." Except that, in this instance, that's not entirely true...

The story's power lies in what it hints at rather than shows – but that subtlety is a little underwhelming. And while Moon and Bá are good at depicting South London architecture, the period detail of the late-1970s setting seems off, the cars, hairstyles and clothing not quite accurate. That said, the relationship between Enn and Vic is one that most will be able to identify with. Who of us hasn't known the feeling of tagging along in the slipstream of a friend who appears more accomplished and at-ease than we can ever hope to be? **James Lovegrove**

GIRLS! GIRLS!
GIRLS!
WE BOTH ATTENDED AN ALL-BOYS' SCHOOL IN SOUTH LONDON
WHILE IT WOULD BE A LIE TO SAY THAT WE HAD NO EXPERIENCE WITH GIRLS--
--VIC SEEMED TO HAVE HAD MANY GIRLFRIENDS, WHILE I HAD KISSED THREE OF MY SISTER'S FRIENDS--
--IT WOULD, I THINK, BE PERFECTLY TRUE TO SAY THAT WE BOTH CHIEFLY SPOKE TO, INTERACTED WITH, AND ONLY TRULY UNDERSTOOD, OTHER BOYS.
WELL, I DID, ANYWAY
Men are from Earth, women are from Beta Omicron 3?

THIS SWEETEST SUMMER ROSE IS MADE FROM SCREECHING MUD
HERE, QUICK
AND ALL GOD'S LITTLE CHILDREN ARE BORN TO US IN BLOOD
!
AND WE WHO LIVE TO SUFFER AS SEASONS BLOOM AND DIE
OH, YES--
I KNOW THE HORN OF EVERY CREEPING THING...
...TO BE A BUTTERFLY
AH, NO MAMA.
The writer describes this Victorian lesbian body-horror melodrama as "unfiltered".

InseXts

Writer: Marguerite Bennett
Artist: Ariela Kristantina
Colourist: Bryan Valenza
Publisher: AfterShock Comics
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-3

★★★★½

Lady Bertram is married to a neglectful, abusive husband. Their relationship, built on the very worst elements of Victorian society, is a sham. Instead, Lady Bertram has found true love in the arms of her maid, Mariah – and one night, much more. Mariah isn't fully human anymore, and now neither is the Lady herself...

There's a huge amount of care and detail in every page here, and not just in Kristantina's art or Valenza's lush, slightly feverish colours. Novels and songs from the time period are referenced frequently, and the world we're seeing very clearly exists outside the panel borders.

That world is reflected in multiple levels of the script too. Issues of class, ethnicity, sexuality and faith are front and centre throughout the book, and Bennett's characters solve the puzzle of their new lives at the same time we do. It's considered, intelligent storytelling that embraces the penny dreadful tradition and combines it with something newer, darker and infinitely more interesting... much like the new-found forms of Mariah and Lady Bertram themselves, in fact.

Rounded out by some beautiful, subtle lettering work from A Larger World, this is a title unlike anything else on the market right now. *InseXts* is an emotionally honest, nuanced lesbian romance, a supernatural thriller, a gloriously chitinous monster film, and an exploration of the best and worst of the Victorian era. **Alasdair Stuart**

Survivors' Club

The horror just stays with you...
AAARGH! WITH THERE'S SOMETHING TERRIFYING IN THE FRIDGE!
GET THE VIDEO CAMERA! I'VE HAVE TO DOCUMENT THIS!

Writers: Lauren Beukes, Dave Halvorsen
Artist: Ryan Kelly
Colourist: Eve De La Cruz
Publisher: DC Vertigo
Format: 9-issue series
Reviewed: Issues 1-9

★★★☆☆

This short-lived horror feels like a cousin of the similarly '80s-indebted *Cabin In The Woods*.

In 1987 a group of youngsters individually faced terrible supernatural forces and survived. In the present day, they gather together to form the titular club to try and understand what happened to them, but their problems still haunt them – quite literally in some cases.

This premise allows Beukes and Halvorsen to have fun playing with various horror tropes. Chenzira encountered a deadly video game; Simon is the survivor of an Amityville-style incident, now famous thanks to movie adaptations; Kiri is haunted by a Ring-style spectre. And there's something a little Stepford about housewife Alice...

The series was cancelled and wrapped up with issue 9, which is a shame as there's potential here. Ryan Kelly does elegant work in the present-day scenes, while the flashbacks allow him to show off a range of styles. Bill Sienkiewicz's covers, meanwhile, are superb – this is what a horror comic should look like!

Unfortunately, while there are moments of eeriness, the dialogue is spotty and the central narrative muddled. The final issue is a satisfying monster mash, which resolves things reasonably well while leaving room for further adventures, but it never quite adds up to the creepy classic its early issues suggested. **Will Salmon**

The Red Virgin And The Vision Of Utopia

Writer: Mary M. Talbot
Artist: Bryan Talbot
Publisher: Jonathan Cape
Format: Graphic novel

★★★★☆

Who was Louise Michel? The star of Mary and Bryan Talbot's third graphic novel collaboration was an anarchist, revolutionary, feminist and soldier. She was also an idealist who lived a remarkable life in the pursuit of a fairer society.

The story of Michel's life is framed by a conversation between American writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman and a friend, with Bryan Talbot employing different, yet compatible, art styles to represent the flashbacks alluded to. We begin at Michel's funeral and then step back in time to Montmartre in 1870, where she's helping the starving locals, before following her through her time in the Paris Commune, imprisonment and eventual deportation to New Caledonia. Fiction occasionally interrupts the fact – both Gilman and Michel were avid readers, and various writers from Wells to Verne are vividly referenced.

It is, of course, a visual treat. Told mostly in monochrome; tiny splashes of pink on one page resolve into blood red flags, and the terrible massacre of 30,000 people in the Commune is represented with a mixture of photography, illustration and the simple but haunting image of blood red between grey stones.

The book is a dense read, and one that demands a couple of readings to fully appreciate, but that's no hardship with material this rich and elegantly rendered. A worthy successor to *Dotter Of Her Father's Eyes* and *Sally Heathcote: Suffragette*, and not just for history buffs. **Will Salmon**

A DISTANT WORLD. YEARS BEFORE.
THAT'S IT! THE LAST CITY ON YORANOVA...
...OBLITERATED.
YOUR PLAN WORKED, GENERAL.
BLOWING THE POWER PLANT'S DESTROYED MOST OF OWN KRON, AND THE POPULATION IS EVACUATED.
THANK YOU... CAPTAIN.
BUT AT SUCH... COST.
YET ITS CENTER STILL STRUGGLES... AGAINST THE LAST OF THE SPACE FORCE.
IT CAN GROW AGAIN, IF THEY DO NOT WIN.
...THIS WAS ALL... FOR...
...NOTHING.
Future Quest: classic feel.

DC Hanna-Barbera roundup

You have to wonder who thought *Wacky Raceland* was a good idea. A silly children's cartoon turned into a gory post-apocalyptic borefest that can't decide whether it wants to copy *Death Race* or *Mad Max* more. Some pretty flat dialogue and characterisation aside, there are at least moments to savour, including the fact each racer's car is sentient, adding an intriguing *Knight Rider* spin to proceedings, and some interesting glimpses of cataclysms that preceded the races.

Likewise, it's hard to know just who DC is aiming for with *Scooby Apocalypse* #1, an attempt to reboot the mystery solving troupe straight into 2016. Misjudged character redesigns aside (come on, even Jim Lee drops the ball sometimes), the needlessly convoluted plot (relating to a nanotech virus that's turned the world's population into monsters) throws in so much exposition over a single issue, it drives the humour away like an exorcised phantom. Porter's pencils pop off the page; it's just a shame he doesn't get anything exciting to draw.

Unlike *Wacky Raceland* and *Scooby Apocalypse*, *Future Quest* #1 doesn't try to dilute its quaint origins; instead we're treated to a confident merging of some of Hanna-Barbera's oldest characters – Jonny Quest, Space Ghost, et al – into one shared story. We're not drowned in exposition either: the proven duo of Jeff Parker and Evan "Doc" Shaner let you see these characters in their element before pulling them together one by one. Shaner's pencils in particular capture that classic adventure story feel perfectly, and just seeing Birdman and Space Ghost take to the skies is a joy. **Dom Reseigh-Lincoln**

> "A CONFIDENT MERGING OF SOME OF HANNA-BARBERA'S OLDEST CHARACTERS"

I SEE YOUR POINT.
ONE PAIR OF EMOTIGOGGLES!
SIT AT THOUGH, I WANNA MAKE SURE THE INTERFACE IS FIRING JUST DANDY
THERE AS ONE CYBERNODE IS ACTIVATED. LET ME MAKE SURE THE CROSSBOW'S MY CONTACT LENSES ARE LINKED AND...
I THINK I SAW A STALL BACK THERE WITH INDIAN FOOD!
RUN-UH...
...HADDUK?
ROSE!
PIZZA, HUH!
PERFECT! NOW WHAT SAY THE TWO OF US GO GRAB SOME GROUBSKI?
UHHHHH
REPPERONI
HEY- IT'S YOUR SPECIAL DAY OUT YOU NAME IT, I'LL EAT IT
I MEAN, LET'S FACE IT
But as for *Scooby Apocalypse*: huh?

Writer: Ken Pontac
Artist: Leonardo Manco
Publisher: DC
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1
★½

Writers: J.M. DeMatteis, Keith Giffen
Artist: Howard Porter
Publisher: DC
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1
★★

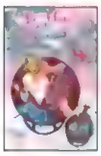
Writer: Jeff Parker
Artist: Evan "Doc" Shaner
Publisher: DC
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1
★★★★

Buffy: The High School Years: Freaks And Geeks

WE... SUSPOSE HER MEN DESTROY HER
I'M HUNGRY
STEPHEN, YOU JUST ATE THAT GAS STATION ATTENDANT
YOU HEARD WHAT BUFFY SAID. RIGHT BEFORE SHE MOVED TO SUNNYDALE AND BECAME THE SLAYER, SHE WAS POPULAR
SHE WAS LIKE CORDELIA

Writer: Faith Erin Hicks
Artist: Yishan Li
Colourist: Rob Espinosa
Format: Graphic novel

★★½



The "Season 10" Buffy and Angel comics have moved so far past where the TV shows left off, they now feel quite different to their source material. So it's nice to be able to dip back into the fleeting high school days before Angel was revealed as a vampire and Xander still harboured the mother of all crusches on Buffy.

"Freaks And Geeks" is a partially successful start to the new series. Yishan Li's manga-styled art is a departure, but does a decent job of evoking the younger characters and a Sunnydale that still just looks like a few headstones and a vaguely gothic chapel, rather than the globe-hopping nature of Season 10. You could argue that's simply pastiche, but it does capture the tone well.

Faith Erin Hicks peppers her script with smart gags and some knowing nods to the world after the show's '90s setting, but its central theme – that, to a squad of nerdy vampires, Buffy is a bit of a bully – doesn't quite work. The fang gang isn't developed enough to make you really care for them. Ultimately, they're killers and, mean or not, Buffy is doing humanity a service by dusting them. Admittedly, *Buffy* has always had a rather confused morality when it comes to killing vamps (basically, it's fine unless they're sexy and occasionally get sad), but putting that at the centre of the book makes it all too noticeable.

Still, "Freeks And Geeks" feels authentic enough to be enjoyable. It's just more of an "I, Robot... You Jane" than a "Prophecy Girl". **Will Salmon**

Old Man Logan

Writer: Jeff Lemire
Artist: Andrea Sorrentino
Colourist: Marcelo Maiolo
Publisher: Marvel
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-3

★★★

The old and embittered ex-Wolverine from 2008's *Old Man Logan* now finds himself displaced in the Marvel Universe proper. After surviving the realm-hopping patchwork world of *Secret Wars*, here Logan's trying to course correct the grim, hero-less future he's survived through to stop it from ever happening – which basically amounts to killing a list of key figures from Logan's future in their present day forms.

This borrows the *Unforgiven*-infused tone of the original *Old Man Logan* but lacks a little of its urgency. Having this version of Wolverine exist in current continuity is novel, though, and his encounters with Steve Rogers and Kate Bishop's Hawkeye are well-judged. The second arc sees Logan trying to protect his future wife from harm, which feels like a *Twilight Zone*-y twist on a standard Wolverine solo tale rather than a total departure.

This is the same team behind DC's excellent New 52 *Green Arrow* run, and the same strengths in visual storytelling carry across – particularly Sorrentino's inventive splash pages. **Samuel Roberts**

Sherlock

Writer: Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss
Artist: Jay
Publisher: Titan
Format: Mini-series
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★½

File under odd, if interesting. The BBC's 21st century Sherlock may seem like a peculiar choice to transfer to manga, but it works fairly well here.

Jay's art elegantly revisits John and Sherlock's debut adventure, "A Study In Pink", rendering Watson's Afghanistan flashback in jagged, blood-spattered panels before concisely summing up his now empty life. And the dialogue is exceptional – but then it would be, it appears to be a word-for-word transcription of Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss' original script.

And therein lies the fundamental problem. In directly moving the TV show to the printed page it can't help but feel rather redundant. Fans have the episodes, so why read them? There's the opportunity here to go deeper into the story, but – so far at least – this is overly reverent to the original. A handsome and intriguing starting point, but so far, only for hardcore fans. **Will Salmon**

Tank Girl: Two Girls One Tank

Writer: Alan Martin
Artist: Brett Parson
Publisher: Titan
Format: Mini-series
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★★★

Where last year's *21st Century Tank Girl* was good fun, it was also rather bitty and disjointed thanks to it's multitude of creators. "Two Girls, One Tank", on the other hand, is a much more substantial affair – a longer story with a suitably insane plot.

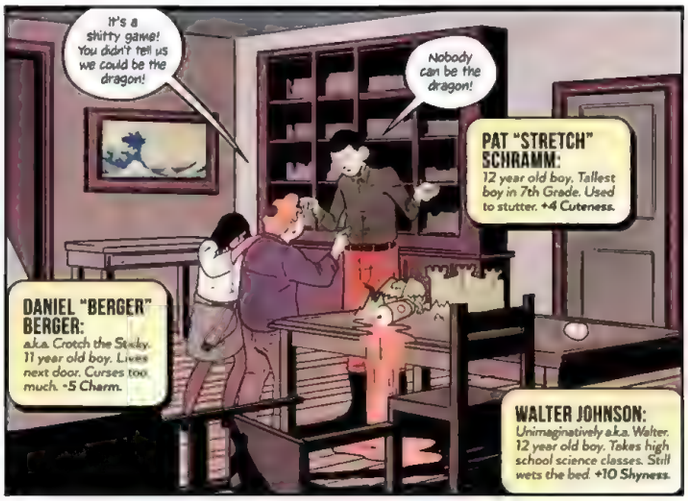
Tank Girl has had her tank stolen by art collector Magnolia Jones. While she searches for a replacement, something strange happens to the nefarious thief. She feels compelled to shave her head, change her clothes and, for all intents and purposes, *become* another Tank Girl. The original, naturally, is hopping mad about losing her home, but a trap forces the two to work together.

The title sets the tone – and if you don't know what it's a direct reference too a) lucky you and b) you're not going to find out here. This is as riotously silly and hilarious as ever, with an on-point script from Martin.

It's also blessed with some wonderfully rich art from Parsons, whose take on our heroine and her world both nods to Hewlett's original work, while maintaining a strong identity of its own. Great colouring from Ned Ivory too.

There was, perhaps, a bit of a question mark over whether there was any need for more *Tank Girl* a few months back, or if the character was too rooted in the '80s. It's a joy to be able to say that, yes, the character still has it and that the long-form nature of this new mini-series really works. **Will Salmon**

TWO GIRLS ONE TANK
DEALER MAGNOLIA JONES FOUND HERSELF MYSTERIOUSLY DRAWN TO TANK GIRL'S TANK AFTER IT WAS DELIVERED TO HER SHOWROOM TO BE SOLD
IN A DRUNKEN TRANCE SHE STOLE MAGNOLIA SHAVED HER HEAD AND STOLE THE TANK FROM HER OWN SHOWROOM HUNTERING OUT INTO THE OUTBACK TRACKED BY CORY RILEY WHO BELIEVED HE WAS FROM THE REAL TANK GIRL
"AH" THAT THE LAW OF GOOD THE DAY DECIDS TO STRIP SMOKING I RUN OUT OF CIGARETTES
MEANWHILE THE ACTUAL REAL TANK GIRL RETURNS IN HER TANK TO FIND CORPSE ADDICTED TO POTATO OSCAR DAVE TO LEARN ABOUT THE MOVEMENT OF LARGE AMOUNTS OF CASH IN ORDER TO STEAL ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY HERSELF A NEW TANK
IN THE DISGUISE OF A LARGE KANGAROO TANK GIRL AND BARNEY RILEY MAKE IT AWAY FROM THE CORPSE FULL OF COPS
BEAT!
PANT
ZEEEP!
FUCK THIS FOR A GAME OF SOLDIERS
TANK GIRL & BARNEY BOOMA HAS YET TO CATCH UP WITH THE ANIMAL
FURTPUFF FART FART


It's a shitty game! You didn't tell us we could be the dragon!
Nobody can be the dragon!
PAT "STRETCH" SCHRAMM:
12 year old boy. Tallest boy in 7th Grade. Used to stutter. +4 Cuteness.
DANIEL "BERGER" BERGER:
a.k.a. Crotch the Sticky. 11 year old boy. Lives next door. Curses too much. -5 Charm.
WALTER JOHNSON:
Unimaginatively a.k.a. Walter. 12 year old boy. Takes high school science classes. Still wets the bed. +10 Shyness.

Holy balls, Mom! It was one Tweet! Forget it already
I wish I could. You were wearing my brassiere
God, Berger! Stop hacking the button down!
Mom! Give me five minutes For fuck's sake!
You talking to that little skeeze girl you always draw nude pictures of?
Is that me?
I gotta go guys.
I wish none of that had just happened.

4 Kids Walk Into A Bank

Writer: Matthew Rosenberg
Artist: Tyler Boss
Publisher: Black Mask Studios
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★★★

When a comic opens with the line "As far back as lunchtime I always wanted to be a gangster," you know you're in for a real treat. And *4 Kids Walk Into A Bank*, the latest from Black Mask Studios, only gets better from there.

Stretch is tall and awkward, Walter is shy and brilliant. Berger is way less tough than he says he is. Paige is far tougher than anyone knows. But when four thugs show up asking to talk to her dad, Paige discovers just how strong she can be.

Welcome to one of the best new books of 2016. From the opening *Dungeons & Dragons* game to the killer final page this is about as good a first issue as you could imagine. Rosenberg's script is inventive, light on its feet and as funny as it is tough. It doesn't back down once, but uses the absurdity of four kids facing off with a gang of wanted criminals to create full bore comedy gold. Even better, the constant layout shifts neatly play with time.

A 24 panel grid is used for a rapid fire conversation at one point and it's far from the only trick up the book's sleeve. Boss's design and art give every character room to shine and Clare Dezutti's flatting and Thomas Mauer's lettering tie everything together. The characters all have their own cadence and look, the art pops but is never showy.

It's an immensely impressive and very funny work. This is one of the most confident and entertaining comics you'll read this year. **Alasdair Stuart**

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CREATING INDEPENDENT COMICS

Writer and editor **Mike Garley** continues his look at how to get ahead in creating and publishing your own comics

PART FOUR: PRINTING & SELLING AT CONS

Mike Garley is a writer of comics, games, screenplays and other such cool stuff. Mike wrote beActive Media's Emmy nominated comic series ***Collider***, as well as ***Wallace and Gromit***, ***Adventure Time***, ***Eponymous***, ***The Kill Screen*** and ***The Samurai Slasher***.

Jimmy Furlong's *Shit Flingers: Bestiary* #1, variant covers.

In this instalment we'll cover the ins and outs of printing your comic, as well as some advice for selling your comic at conventions.

The three main things to consider when printing your comic are: how many comics do you need printed? How quickly do you need them? And what format is your comic going to take? Printing can be (and in most cases is) extremely expensive. Deciding on the size of your print run and how long you intend to sell your comic for will play a major part in all of these questions.

There are a lot of factors to consider and many of these will come down to preference and what works best for you financially. There is no set rule that a comic needs to follow – you just need to make sure that, as well as being financially viable and appropriate for your comic, that the format also suits the audience that might want to buy it.

It's important to have an idea of the physical size of the pages of your comic before you begin, as it's vital that the art is sized correctly. Trying to fix art retrospectively is extremely time consuming, and if you're not capable of doing it yourself it can be very costly too. >

Nothing beats seeing your own comic in print!

PRINTING CHECKLIST

NUMBER OF PAGES

Unless your comic is perfect-bound (like a TPB or a hardcover) – and often even then – the page count *must* be a multiple of four, and depending on your page size, you may find that working to multiples of eight pages gives you even more bang for your buck. You can confirm this with your printer.

SIZE OF PAGES

Most comics are US comic size, but that doesn't mean yours has to be. If you opt for a different size, just make sure the size isn't prohibitive to the reader. Certain sizes may work out more cost effective, too, as there's less trimming or wasted paper for the printer. Check this with your printer before you begin.

INTERIOR PAGES

Black-and-white/greyscale is cheaper than colour, but generally colour is more appealing to comic readers. You can also have thinner or thicker paper stock, as well as having some flexibility over how it's laminated. All of these choices define the look and feel of your comic and will affect not only the cost of your print run, but how much you can expect to sell your comic for too.

EXTERIOR PAGES

There's loads of ways that you can personalise your comic, which will make a difference to the overall look and feel of the book. Things like spot varnishes can look great, but they're costly and not everyone will notice them, although those who do notice will normally appreciate the effort you've gone to.

DEADLINES

How long do you have? Are you trying to get your comic ready for a particular date, such as a comic convention? If so, then there's a chance that your printer will be dealing with multiple other projects with the same deadline, whch can increase turnaround time and the chances of mistakes – printers will automate most of the process, but some things have to be done in person, and if they're overworked, errors can creep in, especially on a tight deadline.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Look at other comics and see what they've done – but don't be afraid to try something new if it suits your project. Talk to people and draw on their experience. A good printer can lead you through the process, but you should have a rough idea of what you need.

"Google is your friend, but so are fellow indie creators – go to as many cons as possible and ask all these questions. It takes time, but you're playing the long game."
– Chris Sides

THE SIZE OF THE PRINT RUN

Setting the size of your print run is very important. Order too many copies of your comic and you might never shift them. Order too few and you'll have a high cost per unit (meaning that each individual comic will cost you more), and you'll miss out on potential sales while you're waiting for the next print run to arrive. Print runs are expensive, but the bigger your run, the cheaper the cost of each individual comic will be.

For example printing 10,000 issues means that you'll potentially make a lot of profit per individual issue sold, but the likelihood is that you'll end up with the majority of your stock (probably between 8,000 to 10,000 issues) unsold, which would give you a big loss overall (as 10,000 copies would be a large initial outlay) and a garage/lounge/bedroom full of boxes of unsold comics.

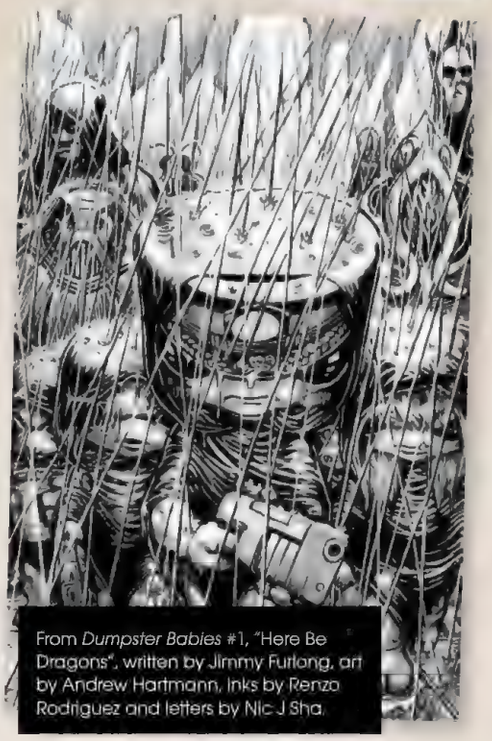
I'd suggest – if you're not crowd-sourcing and have no previous projects under your belt – a print run of around 50-100 copies. This is your 'test the water' print run. It's big enough that you're unlikely to sell out within your first few cons, and if your sales are strong then it's easy enough to place a new order.

You also need to be realistic and know your audience, if your comic is about a secret French knitting group, it may not have as much mainstream appeal as, say, a comic about sexy killer nuns... Sexy killer nuns are big business.

Cover to *Dark Matter*, written by Chris Sides, with cover art by Colin Lorimer.

1453, France
CLACK CLACK CLACK
THEIR QUARTERS BEST BE GLEAMING, BOY.
AYE, YOUR GRACE
HEY GOD, IT'S ME... BROTHER BALDAQUIN.
I CAN HEAR THE LYRICAL MORNING PRAYER CHANTING OF THE CHOIR CARRIED ON THE WIND.
I ACHE FROM THE BEATING AND I'M FREEZING COLD.
BUT IT'S OKAY
THE MOST AMAZING THING HAS HAPPENED...

From *Shit Flingers: Bestiary*: "Simia Negotum", written by Jimmy Furlong, art by Andrew Hartmann, inks by Renzo Rodriguez, colours by Paul Little, and letters by Ken Reynolds.



From *Dumpster Babies* #1, "Here Be Dragons", written by Jimmy Furlong, art by Andrew Hartmann, inks by Renzo Rodriguez and letters by Nic J Sha.

"The cheapest might not necessarily be the best. Printing is expensive. Ideally become friends with a printer. Invite them to come on a caravan holiday or to be best man at your wedding. Anything to bring the price down."
– **Jimmy Furlong**

APPROACHING A PRINTER

After you've got a rough idea of what format your comic is going to take and how many copies you're going to want printed, it's time to approach some printers.

You can easily find printers by performing a quick Google search – get a few names and phone, email or both. You may well find that prices vary massively between different printers. Sometimes by opening a dialogue with a printer and asking them directly how you can take the cost down, you can save a lot of money.

I'd recommend approaching at least one or two printers that specialise – or at the very least have previous experience – in comics. This is even more important if you don't have any experience with design or with sending things to print as "comic aware" printers tend to be more accommodating and patient with inexperienced clients.

Don't be afraid to get quotes from several different printers, and don't feel obliged to just go with the first printer you talk to. Talk to people who have already printed their comic to see if there's anyone they'd recommend or, equally important, if there's anyone they'd recommend you avoid.

Some printers are great at dealing with comic projects and understand what you need, but if you feel that you're dealing with a printer who doesn't understand what you want or need then don't be afraid to thank them for their time and move on.

Don't be scared to ask questions, and like I said, don't feel obliged to just go with the first printer you talk to. Get some quotes, ask other creators, and then make an informed decision about which printer would best suit you and your project. >

PRINTING A CROWD-FUNDED COMIC

Brethren Born alternative cover art by Ben Oliver.

If you're planning to crowd-fund your comic then it's really important to talk to a printer before you launch it, because you'll need to know how much the print run will cost to have any chance of setting a realistic funding goal – you can end up making a loss if you don't. Secondly, it's important to get your comic "print-ready" so talking to a printer at an early stage will help you make sure that you're working towards the correct specs. This can save loads of time when the comic pages are ready to be assembled. It's especially important when you set out a delivery estimate for your backers that you do everything you can to make that deadline.

UK printer ComicPrintingUK has a great guide to the process and lots of helpful advice for novices, which you can read here: *comicprintinguk.com/advice-for-first-time-comic-printers*

Storage can be a problem – make sure you've got the space before ordering your massive print run!

GOING TO COMIC CONS

The *Kill Screen/Samurai Slasher* tables ready for action at MCM Liverpool.

Attending cons is, for many, the primary method of connecting with an audience. Cons can be daunting for first-time exhibitors, but with the right planning and preparation they can be a fun and (hopefully) profitable experience. It's important to remember that it normally takes time before your cons are successful – there's a school of thought that people need to see something three times before they'll give it serious consideration, so sometimes it will take more than one con appearance for people to even stop at your table to give your comic a proper look. Don't let this discourage you. Comics are a long game.

COMIC CON CHECKLIST

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SHOW

It's important to bear in mind what type of comics you make, because that dictates what con would work for you. Each show attracts a different audience. A good way to gauge a show (apart from the obvious: attend it) is to look at who else is confirmed – is there a big comic presence? What about indie stuff? Is it TV or film heavy? All of these things dictate the types of people attending and their interests.

APPLYING FOR THE SHOW

An increasing proportion of shows are moderated, which may mean that you need to attend a few of the smaller shows before you'll be considered – but this isn't always the case and it's worth applying regardless. The worst thing that can happen is that you don't get in that year. To increase your chances of being selected, make sure you link to your work online, so it's easy for people who search for you to find your comic information. Be professional when dealing with show organisers, and remember to keep an eye on when table bookings open and apply in time – this information should be on every con's website.

> "Treat conventions as a way to interact with your readers and fellow creators. Prepare and practise your elevator pitch, be prepared to talk about normal life, and then chat with as many creators as you can. They've been where you are and have invaluable advice as well as nearly always being bloody nice people."
> – Jon Laight

BUDGETING FOR THE SHOW

Shows can be expensive, and it's important to make sure you factor all of your costs in – hotel, transport, food, table costs, all of these can make a massive difference and can often mislead people into attending shows further afield as they sell more comics, unaware that they could be making a big loss by doing so. A lot of this is trial and error.

STOCKING FOR THE SHOW

Selling out at a show is a bad thing. If you sell out it means that you haven't prepared properly and, as a consequence, you will lose sales. 50-100 comics should be enough for your first show. After that, make sure you record what you sell and plan for the next con accordingly.

PRESENTING YOURSELF AT THE SHOW

It seems obvious but having a banner, a clear price list, and a layered setup so that people can have a quick glance at what you're selling is a massive help. If there's too much on your table or your table is messy then people will be a lot less likely to stop and look. You want your table (and yourself!) to be approachable, so that people feel comfortable looking at and touching your comics. If you can, offer bundles and sales to give people an added incentive to buy something. People love bundles. Give the people what they want.

Printing and attending comic cons can seem daunting, but if you take your time, talk to as many people as possible, and thoroughly plan, then you'll be selling your comic in no time!

M--- HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE? I--I NEED TO GET TO MY FAMILY--GET THEM SAFE
DON'T YOU WORRY, MY DIRTY COP FRIEND. WE'LL GO AND GET THEM...
JUST AS SOON AS WE MAKE THINGS RIGHT HERE
BUT, CHANG WON'T STOP
LET'S GO MAKE HIM THEN.
WHO ARE YOU?
MY NAME IS NEWTON, AND YOU AND I ARE GOING TO GET REAL COSY, BUDDY.
OH. MY. GOD.

Brethren Born, written by Jon Laight, pencilled by Phil Knibbs, inked by Luca Cicchitti, coloured by Santiago Ramos, and lettered by Rob Jones.

This job is awful! I mean, I'm clearly carrying the workload of seven people!
Yeah, totally.
There's no creative challenge, the hours are insane, and don't even get me started on the approvals!
Too many chiefs.
Not even. Just one big ugly cheese. I've never met a bigger--
--diva--
Ahh!
Debbie! Hey. Hi. How you doing? Me and Bert were just cracking on. Busy guys. You know.
Bert. Travis, how are you finding the job?
Yeah! Great! Thrilling!
Travis was just moaning about management.
Jesus Bert! Ha! He's just joking! I wasn't complaining. Ha! Crazy talk.
She's going to eat him alive.

Have you spoken to H.R. about this?
Umm... I might have mentioned it in passing...they told me "we're all in this together" and--
Oh, Paul's about as useful as a chocolate fire-guard. You want to speak to Derek.
Employee satisfaction is of the utmost concern to us. I really mean that. I'll gladly sign you off for a holiday. Recharge the batteries. And how about a raise? In fact, Bert probably hasn't filled you in on our pension plan.
Moving forwards we're going to be taking a long hard look at how the day-to-day operations are run. I'm chasing all of the department heads for reports on how this can be achieved. We want everyone to have a say so this is such valuable feedback. Thank you, Travis.
No, thank you, Debbie. That's--that's very kind of you.
Quite welcome. We all want you to feel your contribution here is valued...
"...That you're building something of real permanence."
9 to 5
A Beast Wagon Tail
Writer / Owen Michael Johnson
Artist / Andy Bloor
Letterer / Colin Bell
Beast Wagon created by John Pearson & Owen Michael Johnson

STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

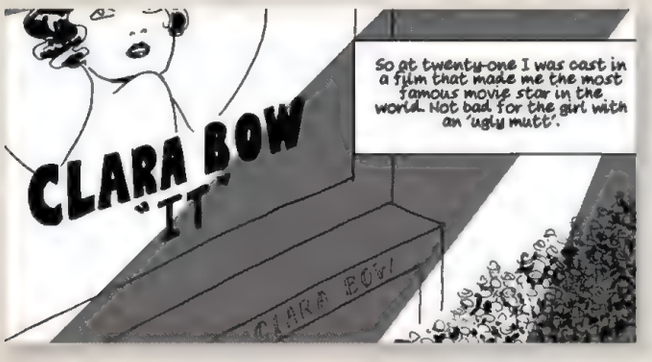
Miles Hamer picks out some of the best self-published comics right now. If you have created a comic, in print or online, we'd love to hear from you! Get in touch at stateofindependents@gmail.com

IT GIRL

Story & Art by Jessica Martin
officialjessicamartin.com

Actress and impressionist Jessica Martin's first pen-and-ink effort is a whirlwind biography of movie starlet Clara Bow's Hollywood ascendance through the silent era and beyond. With a giddying fragility, the tale is a monochromatic snapshot portrait of success through resilience and grit. Elegiac excellence.

Of the whole experience, Martin remarks, "Formatting and getting the pages aligned and in the right size and resolution was the niggly part of self-publishing. But then there was the supreme satisfaction of seeing your creation in print form and sitting on the shelves of comic and book shops after all the hard work was done. Even if I never self-published again I would never regret the experience gained from seeing it all through from conception to print to marketing. And it really gives you a strong sense of what to ask for when dealing with a bigger publisher."

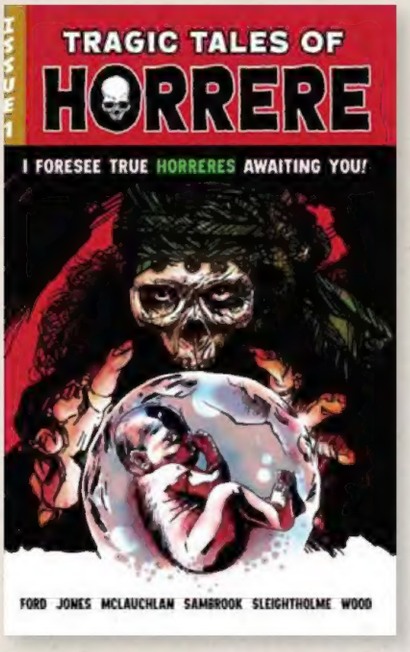

CLARA BOW
"IT"
So at twenty-one I was cast in a film that made me the most famous movie star in the world. Not bad for the girl with an 'ugly mutt'.

KILLING MOON

Story by Chris Denton, Art by Neil "Bhuna" Roche, Colouring by Darren Stephens
www.comicsy.co.uk/pigdogpress/

Both the chuckles and slayings come thick and fast in this breathlessly entertaining assassin adventure, a revival of a 30-year-old property originally created by artist Neil Roche's older brother, Mark. It was released at last year's Thought Bubble, with issue 2 out soon.

The team bringing back medieval mercenary Moses Valentine and pals comprises contributors from across the professional comics scene, having worked individually on titles such as *2000 AD, Sonic the Comic* and the Eagle-nominated *Walking Wounded*. With a cheeky but elegant vivacity to the artwork and a pacing that never lets up, *Killing Moon* is a blast that needs your eyeballs all over it.



TRAGIC TALES OF HORRERE

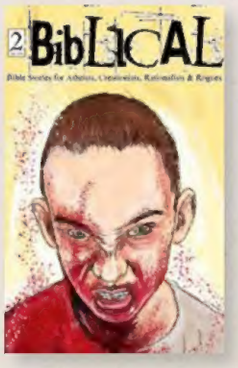
Compiled by Rob Jones, Mike Sambrook & Alisdair Wood.
www.horrere.zone

A dungeon's worth of evil deeds and dastardly nasties is to be found within the fine pages of this terrific horror anthology, a quartet of tales imbued with a deliciously unpleasant streak. There's a pleasing gut-punch to each, and the range of artwork is as varied as it is superb (which is incredibly). It's a joint venture between indie labels Little O Productions and Madius Comics, and the talent bursts from each panel, so grab these twisted wonders before they grab you. Expect gore, gasps, and the occasional giggle.

GRIFF GRISTLE: HERE BE MONSTERS

Story by Mike Sambrook/Rob Jones & Art by Rory Donald
kickstarter.com/projects/1698917327/griff-gristle-here-be-monsters

Damned souls and standing stones are two of the ingredients that make up this delicious dish of a story, served up courtesy of crowd-sourcin', artist-supportin' site Kickstarter. It's the first in a long-running series, but Griff Gristle isn't your average comic hero. A salty seadog of a ghostbuster with a beard so mighty it looks like an angry cloud, he's surprisingly agile for a man who's more Captain Birdseye than America. With its highly stylised and crooked Mignola-inspired artwork from Cornish-based penciller Rory McDonald, spectral mysteries, and jagged attitude, *Here Be Monsters* is an aquatic action behemoth that thrums with chilling atmosphere. The team more than doubled their initial financial goal, so expect more of Griff's sea-bound spooks soon.



BIBLICAL

Story & Art by Tzvi Lebetkin
biblicalcomix.com/biblical

An astonishing series that reworks and filters Scripture through the medium, Tzvi Lebetkin's *Biblical* (subtitled "Bible Stories for Atheists, Creationists, Rationalists, & Rogues") is a simple concept that is never any less than utterly mesmeric. Avoiding the pitfall of preachiness, *Biblical* remains a simply stunning read even if you have all the religious conviction of a baked potato. As Lebetkin explains, his aim is to tell "Bible stories without an agenda that atheists can read and not feel that someone is trying to convince them of anything (other than buying the next issue). Bible stories that people of faith can read and not feel the source material has been betrayed."

Walking a difficult tightrope between the original text and crafting a product true to the medium's form, *Biblical* is cerebral, hypnotic, and gloriously brutal. The gospel according to comics.

POWERLESS: SOME KIND OF HERO

Story & Art by Tony Cooper
hungryblackbird.com

An alternative contemporary UK is the setting for the antics of Hayley Turner – by day a police officer, by night a mask-wearing superhero. As the purple costumed Jump, she's plenty good at catching criminal butt and teleporting instantaneously (think Nightcrawler, only a shade less blue). The catch: masked vigilantes have been outlawed, *Watchmen*-style.

That's the setup for Tony Cooper's graphic novel spin-off from his self-published range of e-books about a semi-retired clique of super-powered ass-kickers. It has startlingly modern look with a touch of the genuine about it – the tired crow's-feet eyes and realistic background minutiae – and deals maturely and engrossingly with the duality of crime-fighting within the law and outside of it. It isn't afraid of DC-esque smash-ery either, delivering supersized smackdowns along with its less bom-bastic smarts. Highly recom-mended.

MY LIFE IN COMICS

DAVID 'MAX' MILLGATE

WRITER/ARTIST OF JACKBOOT & IRONHEEL

THE FIRST COMIC I EVER READ

That was *Roy Of The Rovers*. The adventures of Roy Race and Melchester Rovers F.C.! I had it delivered and I'd leap down the stairs all excited when it dropped through the letterbox every week! Me and my friends were mad about football. We'd swap the bubble-gum stickers, all that fun school playground stuff. Then I discovered *2000 AD* and war comics like *Commando*.

THE FIRST INFLUENCE ON MY WORK

I used to love a lot of the '70s fantasy painters like Boris Vallejo, Chris Foss and Frank Frazetta, and I can't leave out Derek Riggs's album covers for Iron Maiden. He'd put so much detail into those images, so I would sit there listening to the LP and staring at his paintings.

MY FIRST PROFESSIONAL COMICS WORK

That was a short story for the *Judge Dredd Megazine* called "Ladonna Fever", which was a parody on Madonna written by John Smith. I did it fully painted and I cringe when I look at it now. I was unsure of myself as a young professional artist. I had some raw, natural talent, but I lacked confidence.

MY FAVOURITE COMIC OF ALL TIME

I love *Chopper*'s "The Song Of The Surfer", which has art by Colin MacNeil. I liked that you could see him progressing his style, not just page by page, but actually from panel to panel! He started out doing it old-school with line art and Letraset halftones to fully painted by the time he'd finished.

THE BEST COMIC I'VE WORKED ON

Jackboot & Ironheel, as it's the first time I've done the entire thing on my own. I've spent a long time drawing characters and stories created by other people, which I've enjoyed, but there's no better feeling than being the creator of an entire body of work. It's been both the single biggest challenge I've ever attempted and the most creatively rewarding one too.

THE CHARACTER I'D MOST LIKE TO WRITE

I'd like to write another story for my character Eddie Neale in a sequel to *Jackboot & Ironheel*. The ending is still open and in fact I already have in mind that the second book will be set in the former Soviet Union and called *Iron Curtain & Ironheel*.

THE COMICS I'M CURRENTLY READING

I'm a fan of the rock band Rush and their last LP *Clockwork Angels* was a concept album with a spin-off novel by Kevin J Anderson. I've now read the graphic novel adaptation, which was an interesting steampunk story with lush, fully rendered art by Nick Robles. And anything by Mike Mignola – his Hellboy universe has been a big influence on *Jackboot & Ironheel*.

Above: The co-creator of *Sinister Dexter* and long-time *Judge Dredd* artist mixes it in his tale of a footballer turned RAF tail-gunner facing his destiny...

Jackboot & Ironheel #1 is published by IDW in August.

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